The book cover features a complex marbled pattern in shades of blue, green, and brown. A large, light-colored triangle is superimposed over the background, pointing upwards. The title is written in a large, white, serif font, centered within the triangle.

CHANGE FROM WITHIN

Diverse Perspectives on
Domestic Violence in
Muslim Communities

Edited by Maha B. Alkhateeb
and Salma Elkadi Abugideiri

To date, domestic violence in Muslim communities has received little attention. This book is one of the first edited volumes to focus on domestic violence in Muslim families. Bringing the experiences of diverse domestic violence advocates to the table, voices in this text include religious leaders, service providers, and researchers from multiple disciplines. Four survivors also share their stories, illustrating some of the challenges they faced, as well as their paths to healing. This volume illuminates unique domestic violence issues that Muslims face, and emphasizes Islam's intolerance to abuse.

Muslim and non-Muslim domestic violence advocates, social service providers, mental health professionals, religious leaders, community leaders, activists, scholars, public agencies, advocacy organizations, hospitals, doctors, judges, and attorneys, among others, will find this book beneficial. It is also an essential text for university courses in women's studies, social work, mental health, sociology, and criminology departments.

Maha B. Alkhateeb

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Change From Within: Diverse Perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities

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This book is dedicated in memoriam to Sharifa Alkhateeb (1946-2004) for her pioneering efforts and insistence that Muslim communities and their leaders address the issue of domestic violence.

We also wish to dedicate this book in memoriam to Maryam Funches (1952-2007) for her tireless service on behalf of Muslim families.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contributors	9
Introduction	
<i>Maha B. Alkhateeb and Salma Elkadi Abugideiri</i>	13
Part I: The Islamic Paradigm	31
The Qur'anic Model for Harmony in Family Relations	
<i>Zainab Alhwani</i>	33
Part II: The Reality of Domestic Violence	67
A Peaceful Ideal, Violent Realities: A Study on Muslim Female Domestic Violence Survivors	
<i>Keilani Abdullah</i>	69
Domestic Violence Among Muslims Seeking Mental Health Counseling	
<i>Salma Elkadi Abugideiri</i>	91
Freedom is Only Won from the Inside: Domestic Violence in Post-Conflict Afghanistan	
<i>Lina Abirafeh</i>	117
Domestic Violence in the Sudan: Opening Pandora's Box	
<i>Awad Mohamed Ahmed</i>	133
Part III: Survivor Stories	155
My Story	
<i>Siraha Kalam</i>	157
Toasted Cheese Sandwiches	
<i>Suzan Williams</i>	159

Broken Wings No More	
<i>Merjanne Hope</i>	171
A Survivor's Story	
<i>Jennifer Mohamed</i>	183
Part IV: Solutions and Strategies	185
Affecting Change as an Imam	
<i>Imam Mohamed Magid</i>	187
A Legal Guide to Marriage and Divorce for the American Muslim Woman	
<i>Marwa Zeini</i>	203
Development Communications Strategies and Domestic Violence in Afghanistan	
<i>Sarah Kamal</i>	221
A Preliminary Model for Providing a Domestic Violence Program in the Muslim Community	
<i>Maryam Funches</i>	235
Appendix: Resources	247
National Domestic Violence Organizations	249
Local Domestic Violence Organizations	253

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1.1.1

The first part of the book is devoted to a general introduction to the subject of the book. It is divided into two main parts: the first part deals with the general principles of the subject, and the second part deals with the specific details of the subject.

1.1.2

The second part of the book is devoted to a detailed discussion of the specific details of the subject. It is divided into two main parts: the first part deals with the general principles of the subject, and the second part deals with the specific details of the subject.

1.1.3

The third part of the book is devoted to a detailed discussion of the specific details of the subject. It is divided into two main parts: the first part deals with the general principles of the subject, and the second part deals with the specific details of the subject.

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The fourth part of the book is devoted to a detailed discussion of the specific details of the subject. It is divided into two main parts: the first part deals with the general principles of the subject, and the second part deals with the specific details of the subject.

INTRODUCTION

A local imam¹ called a Muslim therapist to set up an appointment for a couple experiencing domestic violence. The imam had officiated over their marriage contract several years ago, and had been asked to intervene by the couple now that their problems had led them to an encounter with the legal system. After several incidents in which the wife had been beaten by her husband, she filed a police report and obtained a restraining order against her husband. She asked the imam to facilitate visitations for her husband with the children, and to escort her husband to the home to get his belongings. With three small children and one on the way, managing alone was challenging for the wife. Within a couple of weeks, she gave in to her husbands' requests: she ignored the restraining order and allowed him to come back home.

The imam insisted that the couple follow through on the court-mandated counseling. When the husband resisted, the imam pressured him and set up the first counseling appointment, which the imam himself attended. The imam convinced the husband to commit to counseling and promised to follow up to make sure the husband fulfilled this commitment.

Counseling sessions revealed that the husband believed his wife was less competent and less intelligent than he, giving him the right to "discipline" her in a way that she could "understand." He justified his controlling behavior and his anger towards her for what he perceived as her "disobedience" and "lack of organization." He complained that their house was always messy and his wife was always tired. He was unable to empathize with his wife who worked outside the home the same hours as he did, but then was also expected to come home to assume the responsibilities of three children under the age of five. Although the husband wanted his wife to work outside the home to help with finances, he did not believe he had a role to share in domestic duties.

Sessions with the wife revealed that she had been depressed for months. She stated that she was afraid of her husband and that he was very rough with the children. She, herself, had come from an abusive family in which she had been physically and emotionally abused for many years by relatives. Since she had no family living near her, she relied on her husband's family for emotional support. They encouraged her to be more patient, to forgive her husband for beating her, and to resume "normal" family life for the children's sake. She stated that it was her intention to divorce him when she obtained the restraining order, but was now confused about what was best for her children.

When the husband completed the required number of counseling sessions mandated by the

¹ *Imam* is an Arabic word which means "leader in a religious context." Although there is no ordained clergy in Islam, the *imam* is a person who is generally assumed to be knowledgeable in religious matters, leads the congregational prayers, and serves as a community leader. In the United States, *imams* often officiate religious marriage ceremonies and divorces, and provide counseling to members of their community.

court order, he began couples counseling, but dropped out after a few sessions. The imam attempted to engage him in religious classes and a men's support group to help facilitate change; however the husband was not willing to participate. Having fulfilled the legal requirements, he refused further services and also discouraged his wife from continuing with her therapy. He promised her that their life would be better and insisted they did not need anyone else to help them.

This vignette, based on real events with the details changed to preserve the identity of the individuals, represents some of the pertinent issues faced by Muslims experiencing domestic violence in our communities. Domestic violence is a global phenomenon that threatens many families regardless of gender, age, religion, race, ethnicity, education or class. As one of the many forms of violence against women, domestic violence is a pattern of behavior between individuals involved in intimate or family relationships in which one person tries to maintain power and control over the other person by using various types of abuse. These forms of abuse include verbal, emotional, psychological, physical, sexual, economic and spiritual abuse. Homes in which abuse is occurring are characterized by the victims living in a climate of fear and humiliation. The traditional definition of domestic violence between two intimate partners is understood more broadly here as "family violence," which can include a range of abuse that occurs within families, such as spousal abuse, in-law abuse, elder abuse, child abuse and incest. Although victims of domestic violence can be either male or female, according to the Family Violence Prevention Fund, the vast majority is female. On both a national and international scale, 1 in 3 women have experienced domestic violence during their lifetime (Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottemoeller 1999). A survey of domestic violence from 15 sites in 10 countries, conducted by the World Health Organization and published in 2005, found that 15-71% of women (with most sites falling between 29-62%) had experienced physical violence, sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner during their lifetime (Garcia-Morena et al. 2005).

It is only in the past 40 to 50 years that domestic violence has become recognized as a serious social problem in the United States (Jasinski 2001). In the past, abuse occurring in families was considered a private matter. There were few, if any, resources to assist victims who were being abused by their partners. Prior to 1970, there was not a single battered women's shelter in the United States (Berry 2000). Currently, according to a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice, 85% of domestic violence victims in the United States are known to be women (Rennison 2003), and various surveys indicate that domestic violence against women occurs in 31% of intimate partner relationships (The Commonwealth Fund 1999). According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, approximately half of all female victims report some type of injury, but only about 29% of them actually seek medical assistance (Collins et al. 1999). In families where one parent is abusing another, 50% of their children are also physically abused (Strauss, Gelles and Smith 1990). Although there are few statistics available on the incidence of domestic violence among faith-based groups in the United States, some studies have

shown that estimates of couples experiencing domestic violence among Christians and Jews include 46% of Seventh Day Adventists (Drumm et al. 2006) and 19-25% of Jews (Graetz 2004).

The American Muslim community is in the early phases of considering domestic violence to be a matter of public concern. The first documented study of the incidence of domestic violence among Muslims, conducted in 1993, reported that 10% of American Muslims experienced physical abuse in their homes (S. Alkhateeb 1999). However, many Muslim advocates estimate that the figure would be much higher if the study had also measured emotional and verbal abuse. The Muslim community as a whole is slowly coming to realize that it is affected by domestic violence as much as the greater mainstream population. As this awareness and recognition is growing, Muslim communities are struggling to understand the phenomenon of domestic violence, to develop appropriate resources within the community to deal effectively with individuals and families impacted by domestic violence, and to identify strategies to prevent further violence in the family. Individual Muslim advocates may espouse different aspects of specific theories on domestic violence. To date, rather than seeking to create a unified theory, Muslim advocates have focused on raising awareness regarding the prevalence of domestic violence among Muslims, and providing education on Islam's stand against the issue of family violence.

With so few resources available on domestic violence in Muslim families, we hope that this timely edited volume will help to shed light on the issues of domestic violence in Muslim families, and to clarify Islam's position against abuse. This book brings together a range of approaches which advocate against domestic violence in Muslim families and communities, and shares the perspectives of survivors, advocates and activists, as well as sociological, clinical, theological, and legal perspectives. We anticipate that this book will help dispel stereotypes about Islam and Muslims' so-called acceptance of family violence, and will help Muslim and non-Muslim advocates and service providers gain insight into the factors associated with domestic violence in Muslim families, so that they can better assist Muslims.

Within the context of Islam, the Qur'an² and the *Sunnah*³ provide a model of healthy family systems with clear teachings about justice, gender equity, mutual respect in marital relations, complementary gender roles, and family units that are

² The Qur'an is the holy book of Muslims, who accept it as the divine word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad through Angel Gabriel. The revelation was in Arabic, so translations of the Qur'an are considered to be interpretations of the divine word.

³ The *Sunnah* is the example of Prophet Muhammad's life as narrated in the *Hadith*, which are collections of his sayings and a documentation of his habits. The *Sunnah* provides many details for implementing Qur'anic teachings in daily life.

grounded in love, compassion, and mercy (Alwani and Abugideiri 2003). Islamic teachings, supported by various examples in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, clearly promote just and harmonious relations between family members, and violations are considered a serious breach of morality. People who commit such violations of teachings are viewed as lacking a proper understanding of Islam, and lacking in their faith. Due to different interpretations of Islamic teachings within varying historical and cultural contexts, some cultural practices in Muslim societies promote the uninhibited superiority of men, which is often shown to be a contributing factor to violence against women. Interventions related to the prevention of domestic violence in Muslim communities center on educating Muslims about the teachings of Islam that prohibit any form of violence in the family.

Until now, discussing domestic violence has been taboo in many Muslim families and communities (Alkhateeb, Ellis, and Fortune 2003). Even the term "domestic violence" has sometimes been an obstacle in moving the conversation forward, because it is perceived by some as a "Western" term that is not relevant or applicable to Muslims. Many Muslims associate the term with the "Western" feminist movement, and believe it to have values that are incompatible with Islam. Furthermore, the term "domestic violence" may also be unfamiliar because it has not traditionally been used in Islamic literature. However, both the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* address the concepts of domestic violence and family abuse within the broad contexts of oppression, harsh treatment, and injustice, and clearly prohibit all behaviors that fall under any of the categories of abuse. We hope that this book will serve to bridge communication gaps that may exist within our faith community to facilitate the necessary conversations that must occur in order for Muslims to uphold their values of equitable and peaceful relationships within the family and society.

While conversations about physical and verbal abuse are slowly occurring, conversations about sexual abuse are more difficult. For example, most Muslims consider the concept of "marital rape" as a contradiction in terms. Historically and legally, in much of the world, the word "rape" has only been used to refer to forced sexual acts by someone other than a spouse. In the Qur'an, an Islamically grounded marriage is a relationship based on mutual love and compassion (Qur'an 30:21), in which spouses are described as "garments" for one another (Qur'an 2:187). In such an egalitarian relationship, husbands and wives adapt to each other's needs, and are encouraged to sometimes put their spouses' needs before their own. Thus, ideally in an Islamic marriage, husbands and wives desiring intimacy show foresight and consideration towards each other, and are understanding if one spouse is not in the mood. Similarly, out of love for each other, spouses may sometimes choose intimacy even if they are not in the mood. In a healthy Islamic marriage, a balance should be achieved that acknowledges and satisfies the personalities and needs of both spouses, and takes potential external stressors into account. Verbal, emotional, physical, and spiritual manipulation is un-Islamic, and at no time is the use of any type of force acceptable by any party. If a spouse insists on practicing sexual

relations in a way that lies outside the Islamic dictates of “mercy” and “compassion,” then that person has *violated* divine orders and is subject to punishment in a court of law in this life, and is also deemed to be held accountable in the hereafter.

In many Muslim communities, responses to addressing domestic violence include denial that it actually occurs in Muslim homes and an unwillingness to “air dirty laundry” in an international climate that already stereotypes and discriminates against Muslims. In deciding to publish this book, we had to consider several factors. We are aware that Muslims face a double bind; as a minority community, Muslims are conscious of their image both inside and outside of their communities. We are aware that Muslims are very cognizant of how they are portrayed in the media, and some may hesitate to address internal social problems for fear of adding fuel to the proverbial fire (Nimer 2002). On the other hand, we also want to highlight the fact that Muslim advocates recognize that non-Muslim service providers are keenly aware of the prevalence of domestic violence in Muslim families since Muslims receive services from mainstream organizations and shelters due to the lack of sufficient social services in Muslim communities. If we, as members of Muslim families and communities, want to help ourselves, we must address the issue of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a reality in every society of every faith, culture, and race. We hope that this book will help the many Muslim families and communities who are currently unaware of this reality to face the issue of abuse. We look forward to Muslim and non-Muslim advocates and communities using the stories and learning tools offered in this book to further understand the issue of domestic violence in Muslim communities, and to provide appropriate resources and support to individuals and families affected by domestic violence. Indeed, the Qur’an instructs Muslims to, “...stand up firmly for justice as witnesses to God, even if it is against yourselves, or your parents, or your relatives ...,” and to, “...fight⁴ in the cause of God and for those who, being weak, are ill-treated and oppressed...” and that if one individual wrongs another, all Muslims must, “...fight against the one that oppresses another until the person complies with the command of God” (Qur’an 4:135, 4:75, and 49:9).

The Qur’an covers the topic of family relations (which includes marriage, divorce, and parenting) in greater detail than any other issue that it addresses, emphasizing the importance of proper behavior and interaction among family members as

⁴ Fighting here includes a broad range of meanings that can be used to affect change. This range can include “fighting” with words, with the pen, through protests, through modeling and in extreme cases, through battle. Thus, educational workshops can be one way to “fight in the cause of God” if the goal is to promote the understanding and implementation of God’s teachings as laid out in the Qur’an. Similarly, “fighting” an abuser can include holding him/her accountable, pressing charges, or obtaining a restraining order.

a key aspect of practicing Islam. The Qur'anic emphasis on families and the laws that govern healthy relationships provide the mandate for Muslim families and communities to establish peaceful families. While most of the Qur'anic verses addressing family matters and family laws are very clear, there are some verses that have been interpreted in multiple ways.

One verse in particular, Qur'anic verse 4:34, has been the subject of much controversy and is often misused by abusers to justify physical abuse against their wives. There is an urgent need for Muslim jurists and scholars to revisit and provide a contemporary interpretation of this verse. In line with Islam's emphasis on women's rights, verse 4:34 was progressive when it was revealed over 1400 years ago. In pre-Islamic Arabia, particularly in Mecca, violence against women was socially acceptable and common, so the revelation of verse 4:34 served to check that violence. The verse encouraged conflict resolution via communication rather than through violence, a novel idea for most men at that time. In instances of marital discord, verse 4:34 required men to refrain from habitually beating their wives, and to instead engage in a multi-step process of communication, which included strategies of conflict resolution and mediation with authority figures. Today however, outdated interpretations of the verse, some from over 1000 years ago, fail to honor Islam's egalitarian spirit towards women. The Prophet Muhammad expressed abhorrence towards the practice of violence against women, and his attitude against mistreating one's spouse is heavily supported by the Qur'anic paradigm which promotes peaceful family relations. Yet, since Prophet Muhammad's death, much of the scholarly interpretations of this verse have allowed for wife-beating under specified circumstances, and with certain restrictions. However, to interpret verse 4:34 as allowing for any type of abuse rejects the full Qur'anic picture, as well as the living example provided through the behavior of Prophet Muhammad. It is time for Muslim scholars to revive the spirit of *ijtihad*⁵ (which was encouraged by Prophet Muhammad himself) in order to develop more clear interpretations of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, so that abusive individuals cannot justify domestic violence. Muslim attorneys and jurists also need to create viable models for balancing Islamic and U.S. laws, particularly with regard to marriage and divorce.⁶

ROLE OF RELIGION & CULTURE

The beliefs and practices of Muslims encompass diverse cultural and religious

⁵ *Ijtihad* is a process under Islamic law in which independent judgment, based on the accepted legal schools of thought, is applied to a particular legal or theological question.

⁶ A movement has begun by scholars in the U.S. to develop a jurisprudence for Muslim minorities, "which takes into account the relationship between the religious ruling and the conditions of the community and the location where it exists." (Al-Alwani 2003, 3).

perspectives, even within the same racial and ethnic groups. In addition, education and socioeconomic status, among other factors, also create diversity among Muslims. There are approximately 1.3 billion Muslims in the world, which comprise about a fifth of the global population. Contrary to popular belief, Arabs comprise a minority of the world Muslim population (only 20%). There are 56 countries in which Muslims are the majority; the largest populations of Muslims are in Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. There are also significant Muslim minority populations located in numerous countries, such as India, China, Central Asia, Russia, Europe and America (Esposito 2002). About 85% of the Muslims in the world are Sunni, and 15% are Shi'a (Esposito 2002). Even within both sects, adherents represent a rainbow of theological and social viewpoints, from the far right to the far left.

In the United States there are approximately 6 – 7 million Muslims with a wide range of backgrounds (Bagby, Perl and Froehle 2001). Among these Muslims in the U.S., one study has suggested a typology that categorizes Muslims into traditional (strongly practicing), bicultural (moderately practicing), acculturated (marginally practicing), assimilated (non-practicing), and recommitted (strongly practicing) (Nadir & Dziegielewski 2001). Another study described four categories of religiosity to include Orthodoxists (literal interpretation of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*), Inclusionists (a selectively modernist interpretation of the Qur'an using the *Sunnah* as a complement), Reformists (a modernist interpretation of the Qur'an using primarily the essence of the *Sunnah*), and Minimalists (belief in the essence of the Qur'an without engaging in ritual practices, and rejecting virtually all the *Sunnah* as outdated) (M. Alkhateeb 2002).

Due to the challenges of sampling religious minorities in a secular country, available studies on American Muslims have mostly examined individuals attending mosques in some capacity throughout the year. One study found that the largest groups of Muslims who regularly attend mosques in North America are of South Asian, indigenous African-American, and Arab backgrounds, respectively; and 16% are converts to Islam (Bagby, Perl and Froehle 2001). Muslim converts in the United States are predominantly comprised of indigenous Americans,⁷ Caribbean-Americans, and more recently, Latin-Americans (Bagby, Perl and Froehle 2001). As a religious minority, there are unique aspects of each element of the American Muslim tapestry, but there are also some common threads that link us together. For example, many indigenous Muslims, depending upon the community they surround themselves with after adopting Islam, have integrated various facets of immigrant culture into their understanding of Islam. For Black indigenous Americans, the

⁷ The term "indigenous Americans," or "indigenous Muslims," is utilized among many American Muslims to refer to African American and Caucasian Muslims.

concept of converts who ascribe religious authority to immigrant Muslims has been referred to as "authentication" (Jackson 2005). Furthermore, more recent generations of indigenous and immigrant Muslims, have begun to forge an "American Islam," one that is becoming more bereft of cultural norms and traditions that may contradict Islamic teachings. "American Islam" emphasizes aspects of American culture that parallel Islamic ways of life.

Like other faith communities, cultural and religious interpretation shape Muslims' understanding of, and responses to, domestic violence (Abugideiri 2005b). Cultural perceptions of gender roles, pride, equality, and the structure of power can significantly impact approaches to interpersonal relations and the definition of abuse. In the Black indigenous Muslim community, for example, some of the significant factors that contribute to these perceptions include the history of slavery and contemporary societal racism, both of which have shaped the way men and women view themselves and each other, as well as the perception of how power is distributed and maintained. Many Black indigenous Muslim men experience feelings of powerlessness that date back to slavery and have been maintained by many historical, social and economic factors. Such factors contribute to the need for control among abusers if they feel challenged by females in the household who may have more education or better jobs. In the event of family violence, while many Black indigenous Muslim victims may be very knowledgeable about potential resources, they may be reluctant to utilize services for fear of furthering negative stereotypes and images among their immigrant Muslim counterparts, as well as the general American public. Furthermore, some Black indigenous Muslims may have lost their original support systems upon becoming Muslim, and feel that they have no family to turn to if they choose to leave an abusive relationship.⁸

In the case of immigrant Muslims, the cultural background from a Muslim individual's country of origin may continue to play a significant role in how abuse is defined and interpreted. On a related note, though no culture should be viewed as monolithic on any issue, there are some commonalities that are specific to immigrant victims of domestic violence. For instance, domestic violence victims from immigrant backgrounds may lack the extended family and social support networks they had to leave behind in their countries of origin. Furthermore, immigrant populations may live in households that include in-laws and other relatives, which, in an abusive family, can expose victims to multiple abusers. The spouses of immigrant victims of abuse may also control them by withholding their passports and other important documents, may threaten to falsely report them to authorities

⁸ The overview of the Black indigenous Muslim experience is based upon email communication with Aneesah Nadir, President of the Islamic Social Services Association, and Bonita McGee, Board Member of the Islamic Social Services Association, on March 26, 2007.

and have them deported, and may also threaten to kidnap their children and take them overseas. Additionally, immigrant victims may be reluctant to report abuse to legal authorities for fear that their abuser may be deported. Immigrant victims face an added reluctance to leave their abusive spouse due to the stigmatization of divorce in many communities, including the shame that may be directed towards them and their families, and the rejection they may fear from their communities. These common experiences of abuse faced by immigrant women have been well documented by organizations such as Legal Momentum, the Family Violence Prevention Fund's Battered Immigrant Women Program, and the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild.

Looking at the wider system, the intersection of culture and religion, socioeconomic status, political history, and a history of patriarchal oppression related to cultural practices of family violence in particular, needs further study by Muslims. Notably, many indigenous and immigrant Muslim families in the United States have a history that includes slavery, living under conditions of war, living in refugee camps where they experienced torture, escaping oppressive government regimes, and experiencing oppression under colonization for several generations (Abugideiri 2005a). This history also includes present-day un-Islamic practices of violence against women, such as honor killings, female genital mutilation, dowry-related deaths, acid burning, forced prostitution, trafficking, exploitation of labor within the home, female foeticide, sexual harassment, rape, and forced marriage, in addition to socially accepted practices of wife-beating. Muslim women, like other women, experience such types of abuse in the United States, as well as abroad. This culture of oppression impacts how individuals perceive abuse, how they define it, how they problem-solve and communicate, and how they relate to each other. Keeping these contexts in mind adds complexity to understanding the phenomenon of domestic violence among many Muslim families.

Another layer of complexity is added when the misuse of religious texts is added to cultural norms that may encourage or facilitate abuse. According to FaithTrust Institute, some abusive Christians and Jews misuse the Bible, Torah, and other religious texts to support their abuse. Similarly, some abusive individuals who identify themselves as Muslim misuse the Qur'an to justify their misbehavior (S. Alkhateeb 2002). In such situations, abusive individuals use their false understanding of the Qur'an and traditions of Prophet Muhammad as a weapon against their victims. They quote Qur'anic verses out of context, reference unsubstantiated traditions of Prophet Muhammad, and sometimes even confuse cultural practices with Islam, since, in some families, religion has been steeped in cultural tradition and the boundaries between culture and religion have been blurred. In such practices of "spiritual abuse" across faith traditions, religious verses have been manipulated to benefit those in power (Fortune 1991). Spiritual abuse is not always limited to the confines of the home; abusive behavior can even exist between fellow community members. This method of abusing power may also be practiced by some Muslim clergy and lay leaders. In particular, the form of spiritual abuse that

we are referring to here is mostly gender based, as it emphasizes women's submission to men, and twists Islamic teachings to enforce male power and superiority over women. When the Qur'an was revealed, Islam secured significant rights for women, including the freedom of religion, the equality of men and women before God, legal and financial rights, the right to own property, the right to work, the right to divorce, and the right to sexual satisfaction. However, among some Muslims, these Islamic rights are not recognized in many individual, family, and societal practices. Muslim women who internalize spiritual abuse struggle with the feeling that they will be wronging God if they challenge the violence, and that they will be condemned by their community leaders and the larger community if they leave their abusive situation.

A lack of understanding by mainstream service providers of the unique cultural and religious issues relevant to Muslims may lead to services that are not culturally sensitive or appropriate. Similarly, a lack of understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence sometimes leads Muslim leaders, community members, and extended family members to discourage victims from seeking appropriate intervention and support. There are also differing opinions within Muslim leadership as to whether Muslims should utilize resources in mainstream society or rely solely on Muslim-based services, to insure that interventions are not in conflict with religious values and beliefs. Increased stereotyping and discrimination of Muslims post-9/11 has also created a more pressing need for advocates and service providers to develop widely-available counseling and domestic violence interventions that are culturally appropriate for Muslim families experiencing abuse.

MUSLIMS TAKING A STAND AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

As we have worked with Muslim communities and domestic violence advocates across the country, we have become aware of a global surge in activism against domestic violence by Muslims in recent years, primarily by women. Many grassroots organizations have sprung up in Muslim-majority countries and in countries with significant populations of Muslims. Their goals have included providing direct services to victims of domestic violence, raising awareness levels, disseminating educational resources, conducting research, documenting cases, and advocating for social, legal, and political reforms. In the United States, as Muslim leaders are becoming more aware of the prevalence and impact of domestic violence, several Muslim communities have taken an active role in addressing the issue of domestic violence. In the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, for instance, several mosques have posted a declaration signed by various local imams proclaiming their stand against any form of abuse. At least one mosque we know of has placed educational brochures about domestic violence, as well as resources for victims, in the women's bathroom, so that women can access the information privately without fear of retaliation from the abuser or community members. In addition, several local imams have established collaborative relationships with judges in family courts, with mental

health professionals, and with agencies that serve victims of domestic violence. Throughout the U.S., many Muslim leaders are also serving on local domestic violence task forces, participating in interfaith activities to prevent domestic violence, and organizing workshops for their communities to teach families about peaceful relationships. Also, in weekly sermons, imams are addressing topics of domestic violence, gender issues, and the problem of taking verses out of context. Such efforts are important steps in reducing domestic violence in Muslim communities.

Gradually, as Muslim communities and organizations across the country face the realities of domestic violence, they are beginning to establish a variety of services, such as shelters and culturally appropriate alternatives to mainstream social services (Faizi 2001). For Muslims advocates, the development of culturally appropriate services for Muslims experiencing abuse has been eased by the existence of ethnic-based domestic violence organizations. In response to the lack of culturally appropriate services for ethnic minorities, various ethnic-based organizations, focusing on African, Arab, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino and Native American communities have been established during the last couple of decades, predominantly in major urban areas in the United States (VAWnet 2007). Ethnic-based domestic violence organizations have significantly contributed to services for abused minorities, particularly women, and in many ways, have helped to pave the way for the establishment of Muslim domestic violence organizations and services. Ethnic-based domestic violence programs and shelters serve significant numbers of Muslims. Though domestic violence services may be ethnically or religiously categorized, the types of abuse experienced, and the services and advocacy required by Muslim individuals and families, may cut across ethnic and religious categories. In the last ten to fifteen years, dozens of Muslim domestic violence organizations based in the United States have been established. Muslim organizations advocating against domestic violence in Muslim communities include Al Baitu Nisa in Gaithersburg, Maryland; Baitul Hemayah in Newark, New Jersey; Baitul Salaam Network in Atlanta, Georgia; Central Texas Muslimaat in Austin, Texas; the Committee on Domestic Harmony in Long Island, New York; the Foundation for Appropriate and Immediate Temporary Help and their program Muslim Men Against Domestic Violence in Herndon, Virginia; the Islamic Social Services Association, a national organization based in Tempe, Arizona; Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, a national organization based in Washington, D.C.; NISWA in Lomita, California; and Turning Point in Flushing, New York. (*See the Resources section at the end of this book*).

Many of these Muslim domestic violence programs provide interpretation, legal advice or referrals to legal resources, crisis intervention, financial assistance, individual and family counseling, premarital counseling, imam counseling, support groups, and job placement. A few programs, such as Baitul Salaam and NISWA, have shelters. Many provide advocacy programs in which Muslim community members and leaders can raise their awareness regarding domestic violence, and can

educate themselves on their Islamic and legal rights. Muslim domestic violence and social service advocates also provide expertise and trainings for governmental and mainstream organizations to sensitize them towards the needs of Muslims, as well as provide comprehensive assistance to families affected by domestic violence. In some of these organizations, there is an informal system of cross-referral between local imams, Muslim therapists, and other service providers. Although far from being able to meet all of the needs of the Muslim families impacted by domestic violence, cross-referral and collaboration provide a preliminary working model on which to build broader services. We believe that significant factors in the success of this cross-referral system are: the respect that each advocate has for the other's role; the recognition that domestic violence is a serious social and moral issue among Muslims; and the willingness to address the issue from both a spiritual and social perspective.

Our organization, the Peaceful Families Project, was founded in 2000 by Sharifa Alkhateeb (1946-2004), a tireless advocate for individuals affected by domestic violence who spent 40 years advocating for the civil, human, and women's rights of Muslims. Known for her zest for life and proactive change, she brought together Muslim leaders, community members and social service providers in numerous cities across the United States from 2000-2004 by conducting workshops to raise awareness on domestic violence. As one of the pioneers for domestic violence advocacy in Muslim communities, Mrs. Alkhateeb's domestic violence workshops inspired future advocates, jump-started vocal anti-violence community activism, and motivated communities to create their own domestic violence programs. Upon inheriting her significant and wide-impacting project, our goal has been to honor her legacy and to continue to effect change. In the last two years, we have conducted multiple workshops in Muslim communities throughout the United States. We also have facilitated and presented sessions on domestic violence at national Muslim conferences and conventions with the goal of reaching the broadest audience possible. To date, our work has included convening a gathering of Washington, D.C. area imams to sign a mutual declaration against domestic violence; conducting a pilot survey on domestic violence at the Islamic Society of North America's 2006 annual convention; and assisting FaithTrust Institute in the development of the first documentary film on domestic violence in American Muslim communities.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

We hope that this book, our first attempt in bringing together a variety of perspectives, will help to address the significant literature gap regarding the Muslim experience of domestic violence. We solicited authors throughout North America and also internationally in the hopes of bringing diverse voices to the table under the common umbrella of working to end domestic violence. Like other advocates addressing domestic violence in Muslim communities, their interpretations of Islam

regarding family structure and gender roles may differ, as well as their approaches towards advocacy work. Yet, they are united in their belief that all Muslim families should be free from abuse. This book has been divided into four sections: **The Islamic Paradigm, The Reality of Domestic Violence, Survivor Stories, and Strategies and Solutions.**

The Islamic Paradigm lays the foundation for establishing and maintaining peaceful families with Zainab Alwani's thorough explication of Qur'anic rulings, prophetic traditions, and jurisprudence that relate to the concept, structure, and relationships of families in Islam. Alwani's *The Qur'anic Model for Harmony in Family Relations* highlights the Islamic sources of knowledge and its paradigm for family relations. Alwani also analyzes the Islamic concepts and guidelines for consultation, authority, parenting, and prevention of abuse.

Section Two, **The Reality of Domestic Violence**, highlights some of the experiences and issues faced by Muslims experiencing domestic violence. Keilani Abdullah's chapter *A Peaceful Ideal, Violent Realities: A Study on Muslim Female Domestic Violence Survivors* offers a look at the Islamic concept of marriage and divorce, and shares the results of her study focusing on the role that marital status (including common law marriages), race, and socioeconomics played, and the types of abuse the women experienced. In *Domestic Violence Among Muslims Seeking Mental Health Counseling*, the results of Salma Elkadi Abugideiri's study emphasize the effects that domestic violence has on each family member, and the correlation between experiencing abuse and developing mental health problems. Abugideiri stresses the need for imams and other Muslim leaders to play a prominent role in ending domestic violence.

The following two chapters are selections from experiences of Muslims outside the United States and feature studies of Afghan and Sudanese women. In *Freedom is Only Won from the Inside: Domestic Violence in Post-Conflict Afghanistan*, Lina Abirafeh examines the political situation contributing to family violence in Afghanistan, the current experiences of Afghan women, and the types of abuse they are encountering. Abirafeh's study encompasses Afghan women and men and their perspectives on gender-focused interventions, and finds that interventions focusing solely on women's needs rather than both genders can have negative repercussions when men feel left out of the picture. Awad Ahmed's *Domestic Violence in the Sudan: Opening Pandora's Box* researches the domestic violence experiences of Sudanese women, including the circumstances in which abuse was likely to occur, the types of abuse women were subjected to, and the exacerbating factors of culture, poverty, low education, unemployment, and substance abuse.

The third section of this book, **Survivor Stories**, includes the stories of four Muslim women which offer direct insight into the lives of Muslim domestic

violence victims, and sheds light on their ability to empower themselves and transform their circumstances.⁹ Siraha Kalam's *My Story* describes her challenging childhood, the abuse she endured at the hands of her husband, and the resolution she has achieved. In *Toasted Cheese Sandwiches* Suzan Williams traces her turbulent and abusive childhood, her sudden decision to permanently end the years of abuse inflicted by her husband, and her path towards self-sufficiency. Merjanne Hope's *Broken Wings No More* confirms the importance of inner peace, spirituality, and a direct relationship with God. Despite experiencing emotional and spiritual abuse by her husband, she kept her faith and inner connection to God throughout her ordeal. In the last chapter of this section, Jennifer Mohamed's *A Survivor Story* shares her painful ordeal with incest as a child, the long-term effects of which have lasted until today. Each of these four stories are a source of awareness for those unfamiliar with Muslim experiences of domestic violence, and are a source of inspiration not only to women currently encountering abuse, but also to advocates, family members, and friends who are determined to provide help and support.

The chapters in the last section of this book, **Strategies and Solutions**, are written from the perspectives of an imam, an attorney, a journalist and researcher, and a community activist. Each perspective offers approaches from their respective fields towards addressing and preventing domestic violence. In an interview with Imam Mohamed Magid in *Affecting Change as an Imam*, he discusses his role in the Muslim community as an advocate working against domestic violence, shares the methods he employs to combat abuse (including the usage of Islamic teachings as a prevention tool), and imparts his suggestions for other community leaders and members seeking to address abuse. In *A Legal Guide to Marriage and Divorce for the American Muslim Woman*, Marwa Zeini outlines the commonalities and distinctions between Islamic and American law regarding marriage, divorce, financial support, and child custody. She stresses the need to have improved education for Muslim women regarding their Islamic and legal rights, for Muslim community and religious leaders so they can better assist women, and for the American judiciary through diversity training to create greater awareness of Muslim sensibilities. Sarah Kamal's *Development Communications Strategies and Domestic Violence in Afghanistan* covers the social repercussions of twenty years of conflict affecting Afghan women, and the communications tactics used by the United Nations Development Fund for Women to advocate change through media campaigns. The UNDF strategy involved the creation of a multilingual toolkit for journalists that indirectly addressed domestic violence by emphasizing gender-neutral methods of empowerment, such as through education and employment, and the ways in which all family members and society would benefit. We conclude our book with Maryam Funches' *A Preliminary Model for*

⁹ All the survivors in this section have chosen to use pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

Providing a Domestic Violence Program in the Muslim Community, a framework that Muslim communities will find useful as they develop strategies for addressing domestic violence. The model includes community and client services, community education, sample workshops, crisis management techniques, recommended counseling and advocacy approaches, developing a volunteer program, and encouraging the involvement of community leaders and members.

LOOKING AHEAD

We look forward to this edited volume generating considerable interest and discussion, and also anticipate Muslim communities following the lead of the pioneering organizations we have described above. We also look forward to seeing more Muslim leadership gain a deeper awareness of domestic violence and the ways in which families are impacted daily by this phenomenon. It is only when the silence is broken and we are able to talk about this social illness without fear that we will be able to achieve the goal of eradicating violence from our lives. Once we are able to discuss domestic violence openly and gain more insight into how it impacts Muslim communities at the individual, family, and societal levels, we can identify effective interventions. By the same token, we can identify programs and mechanisms that are geared towards the prevention of domestic violence.

An important part of achieving these goals depends on Muslim communities, along with their leadership, implementing the Qur'anic injunction of taking a united "stand for justice"¹⁰ against all forms of family violence. This stand will first require Muslims to recognize the importance of implementing Islamic teachings as a whole when applying them to daily life, rather than taking segmented parts of teachings that may have negative ramifications when implemented out of context from the complete Islamic social paradigm. Achieving these goals will also require community members, leaders, and advocates to develop a plan for a coordinated response in which they work together effectively. In the vignette at the beginning of this introduction, the example of the imam's involved and coordinated response to domestic violence is currently not the norm in most Muslim communities, though such efforts are starting to become a trend. The example of the imam illustrates the type of coordination and collaboration which leads to interventions that offer the possibility of change, as well as the encouragement of accountability for abusive individuals.

We hope that every Muslim individual will take it upon him or herself to become educated about the issues of domestic violence and begin discussing it openly.

¹⁰ Qur'anic Verse 4:135: "O you who believe! Stand up firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah (God), even as against yourselves, or our parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor. For Allah (God) can best protect both..."

We look forward to every Muslim family and community challenging all forms of degradation of women in their private and public lives. We urge more Muslim men to become vocal advocates against domestic violence, as abuse happens to men too; and their mothers, sisters, and daughters could become victims. Muslim communities and Islamic centers can invite domestic violence speakers to raise awareness, educate community members about the issues, and promote advocacy. Muslims can help by volunteering their time at social service agencies and organizations helping victims of domestic violence, at domestic violence advocacy organizations, and at abused women's shelters. Those who do not have the time to volunteer can help such organizations by donating monthly, as an annual portion of their *zakat*,¹¹ or by providing supplies, food, clothing, printing services, property, or other forms of in-kind donations.

We hope that advocates and service providers of all faiths and ethnicities will use this volume as an opportunity to bridge the communication gap that has kept us working separately for far too long. Domestic violence is a family and community problem, not just an individual problem. We are all doing similar work and supporting populations who face similar issues. It is time to pool our knowledge and resources in order to develop effective strategies, working models, theories and interventions that will be part of our mission of "fighting oppression" in our homes and our communities.

We anticipate that the publication of this book will generate mixed responses. However, it is our sincere hope that this volume will assist in triggering the willingness of Muslim families and communities to honestly address the proverbial elephant known as domestic violence, which has the potential to destroy families and generations of communities. With great optimism, we look forward to sharing the insights provided in these ground-breaking chapters, which will be of interest and use not only to Muslim communities, but to secular advocates and advocates from other faith and ethnic communities. Only by working together will we be able to combine our resources and knowledge in an effort to develop effective interventions and preventive strategies to live a violence-free existence.

Assalamu Alaikum (may peace be upon you).

Great Falls, Virginia
April 2007

Salma Elkadi Abugideiri
Maha B. Alkhateeb

¹¹ *Zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam, and requires Muslims to give a portion of their wealth to the needy.

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THE QUR'ANIC MODEL FOR HARMONY IN FAMILY RELATIONS

By Zainab Alwani

INTRODUCTION

The question of gender, the role of men and women, and the meaning of marriage and family are among the top issues in the debate among social scientists, lawmakers, and religious communities. Defining the meaning of family and its structure has become one of the main challenges encountered by modern societies, especially in the West. In the November 2004 issue of the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, for instance, emphasis was placed on the concept of marriage and family as a societal unit. The debate among the experts in that volume emphasized the level of family dysfunction, the high rate of divorce, and the failure of parenting as it heads towards a potential disaster. The authors called on experts in different fields to offer remedies and solutions to this societal crisis.

This chapter will explain that Islamic teachings regarding family structure are unique in providing theoretical and practical answers to modern challenges. Furthermore, it will construct, from the study of the Qur'an and the prophetic teachings, a model for harmonious family relations. It is my hope that having this understanding may show the way towards realizing the significance of establishing healthy and peaceful relations, especially among family members, which in turn will lead to generating a peaceful human culture and society.

EXPLORING ISLAMIC SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

The primary sources used in this study to define the Islamic perspective on family structure are the Qur'an¹ and the traditions² of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).³ For Muslims, the Qur'an is the ultimate authority and reference; and is thus

¹ The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, and the Arabic text has been preserved in its original form. The Qur'an has been translated into most of the world's languages; yet only the original text is accepted as divine. This study relies on Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation unless otherwise noted.

² The collections of Traditions, or *Hadith*, used for this paper are narrated by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, and Bin Majah and were taken from Harf International Technology's CD-ROM.

³ The abbreviation for "peace be upon him."

considered utterly conclusive since the Creator (*swt*)⁴ pledged to safeguard it (Qur'an 15: 9). Millions of Muslims read and recite it in its exact original words and in the form that it was revealed over 1400 years ago. This enables it to remain the foundation upon which all Muslims agree at all times and in all places, despite the various ideologies and interpretations that have developed over time. Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad is the seal of prophethood in a long line beginning with Adam.⁵

The life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) exemplified the Qur'anic teachings. Thus, Muslims view him as a model for mankind, fashioned in the best manner with the best moral qualities (Qur'an 33:21). The prophet's life and teachings have been recorded into *Hadith*, which serve as detailed examples for the way Muslims should live their daily lives.

In order to understand Islamic family law; there are two important concepts that need to be clarified; they are *Shari'ah* and *fiqh*. *Shari'ah* is linguistically derived from the Arabic root word meaning "road," or "the road leading to God." *Shari'ah* is "divine law," and, in a sense, it is the concrete embodiment of "divine will" according to which human beings should live in both their private and public lives. *Shari'ah* guidelines construct a preventive model by providing a framework for healthy interpersonal relationships. Divine laws foster values, establish clear boundaries, and identify priorities in relationships. Divine laws guide human action and encompass every facet of human life including 'ibada (the code of worship), *silook* (a system of ethics), spirituality, and *mu'amalat* (transactions). Divine laws are based on mercy and ease,⁶ and their objectives focus on preserving universal principles, such as justice, equity, and piety - cores of the monotheistic tradition.

Fiqh, linguistically meaning comprehension, is the effort of humans to understand the "divine laws," and then to integrate this understanding with reality. Ibn Khaldun, in *al-Muqqadimah*, described *fiqh* as:

...the knowledge of God's rules, *ahkam*, regarding the behavior and actions of adult individuals, be they obligatory, forbidden, recommended, abhorrent or per-

⁴ The full phrase is "*subhana wa ta'ala*," or "God is glorified and exalted."

⁵ Muslims believe in all of the prophets beginning with Adam and including Abraham, Moses and Jesus. They believe that Muhammad (peace be on them all) is the final prophet. Muslims believe that the message of Islam is the continuation of the same message brought by previous prophets, and they follow Prophet Muhammad as a model for their behavior and way of life.

⁶ The Qur'an describes the main characteristics of the *Shari'ah* in 7:157 - "Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own scriptures in the Law and the Gospel, for He commands them what is Just and forbids them what is evil; He allows them as lawful what is good and pure and prohibits them from what is bad and impure, He releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them..."

missible. The formulation and articulation of these rules, using those means, is what is referred to as *fiqh* (Ibn Khaldun 1967, 445).

Muslim scholars across time and space have searched for methods that enable them to understand and accurately comprehend the teachings of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*⁷ in relationship to reality, or *ahwaqi*'. Therefore, the '*ulema* (Muslim scholars) developed different methods and systems that allowed them to understand the complexity of *ahwaqi*'. The meaning of reality includes different facets: human thoughts and actions, and their influence on establishing different traditions, and customs. Furthermore, space, time, human society, and religious/legal rulings (the *fatawa*) have had a great influence on formulating reality. *Fiqh* was developed in response to local cultural, social, political, or legal needs. In contrast, *fiqh* has had tremendous influence on forming different cultures. Consequently the *fuqaha* (jurists) considered customs and human experience as one of the sources of jurisprudence or *fiqh*.⁸

Today, among the greatest challenges confronting the American Muslim community is how to integrate into American society while preserving and practicing their faith in a society guided by Judeo-Christian and secular values. Preserving Islamic family values is one of the greatest challenges facing the American Muslim community. Can Islam introduce a model that generates and constructs a healthy and peaceful family regardless of space or time? Islam offers a wide range of attitudinal and behavioral models applicable in different situations. The models are prescribed in the divine sources, and it is the mission of this research to bring these models to the surface. This study will focus on constructing models for a healthy marriage, peaceful divorce, and prosperous parent-child relations.

FAMILY RELATIONS: BETWEEN CULTURE AND RELIGION

The word "religion" in the English language is derived from the Latin word *religio*, the root of which means "to bind," or that which binds humans to the truth. *Deen* (the Arabic term for religion) means a way of life, allegiance, judgment, debt or account. The main role of religion is to define a set of guidelines, principles, values, morals and ethics through its teachings. Islam is one of the religions that attempts to offer a model that deals with many complex problems facing people across time and space. The coherence of the central belief system in Islam is based on the

⁷ *Sunnah* refers to the way of the Prophet Muhammad as documented in the *Hadith* literature.

⁸ The first source is *wahy*, or divine inspiration (Qur'an and the sound *Sunnah*), followed by '*aql*, or reason, to explain the texts and search for the reasons behind legislation, and finally experience, custom, and the public interest. Also see Taha Jaber Al Alwani's *Source Methodology in Islamic Jurisprudence*.

relationship between the act of submission and its consequences in a state of peace. Peace has outer dimensions in security, and an inner dimension in tranquility or serenity.

Islamic jurists identify the purposes of *Shari'ah* rulings under five categories: preserving and maintaining one's life, freedom of religion, intellect and freedom of speech, lineage, honor and dignity, and finally, wealth. If any action violates one of these purposes, it is considered prohibited. These statements may be contrary to misconceptions that are sometimes perpetuated by people who do not have an adequate understanding of the Islamic paradigm. Sometimes, even Muslims themselves may take verses from the Qur'an or sayings of Prophet Muhammad out of context to justify behavior that contradicts these purposes.

In Amr Abdalla's article, *Principles of Islamic Interpersonal Conflict Intervention: A Search Within Islam and Western Literature*, he describes a conflict resolution model:

The process of modeling is the intermixture of religious and traditional values, attitudes and behaviors. For centuries, Islam came to coexist with other value systems, especially the traditional ones.⁹ As the Islamic expansion quickly took the shape of a state, its rulers incorporated institutions and techniques in use by the existing empires of the time such as the Byzantine and Sassanid empires. Several of the traditions and institutions were not necessarily consistent with the basic divine value system; yet they persisted over the years until they became so enmeshed with Islamic history that many people, even Muslims, believed that they were part of their system sanctioned by the Qur'an and Sunnah. The practice of rituals associated with marriage, and institutionalized violence against women are examples of traditions and institutions that not only were foreign to Islam, but also contradictory to Islamic divine values. Yet in some nations, majorities of Muslims believe that these values are rooted in Islam. (Abdalla 2000-2001, 169-170)

It is important to distinguish between Islamic sources, primarily the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, and Muslim cultures (*urf*), which have developed over centuries of integrating Islamic teachings with cultural and traditional practices in different parts of the world. Culture and religion may interact in many ways, leading to a wide range of responses in Muslim families.¹⁰ In *Women in Islam: The Western Experience* Anne Sofie

⁹ One cannot fairly address the position of women in pre-Islamic Arabia without an understanding of the tribal system. Tribal structure and customs had the greatest impact on women's rights. Tribes were considered the main unit of Arab society before Islam, and signified unconditional loyalty to fellow tribesmen. In the *History of the Arabs* Phillip Hitti described the sentiment as, "The clan's claim upon its members was strong enough to make a husband give up his wife," and the motto of the time as, "Be loyal to thy tribe."

¹⁰ See Anne Sofie Roald's book *Women in Islam: The Western Experience* for a more detailed discussion of the integration between religion and culture.

Roald explains that Islamic legislation is based on interpretations of the sources in different contexts with specific local traditions (*'urf*) constricting the moral norms of society by having an influence on the legislation,

Today local moral customs (*'urf*) differ both from those of ancient Arab society and from one society to another, and this creates tension between what is legal and what is moral. (Roald 2001, 160)

The Meccan society at the Prophet's time, for example, differed from Medinan society in the attitudes towards, and treatment of, women. Omar ibn al Khattab, a companion of Prophet Muhammad and the second Caliph, explained the differences in a *hadith*, saying that unlike Meccan women who were controlled by men, Medinan women were esteemed on the same level as men. Medinan women were strong, had a say in decision-making, and worked together with men. When the Meccan women, including the Prophet's wives, migrated to Medina, they learned the ways of the Medinan women, and began to question the decisions of their husbands and to debate with them (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book of Marriage, Hadith #4792). The behavior of the Medinan women is supported and encouraged by the gender relations model in the Qur'an, and by the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad.

Mazen Hashem, a contemporary researcher, analyzed and suggested some of the reasons for the decline in Muslim women's status after the time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in his research paper, *A Perspective of Islamic Reform Regarding Women's Issues* (Hashem 1993). He suggested that urban settings led Muslim society into great economic and behavioral changes. Slavery as a phenomenon, for instance, was supposed to be abolished according to Qur'anic teachings, but jurists of the time focused on the issue of treating slaves morally and giving them legal rights, rather than ending the practice. Lack of education left some slaves unaware of Islamic value systems, and later created a great gap between them and Muslim society. Slaves lived and interacted daily with all family members, especially women and children. Hashem suggests that negative behaviors and attitudes of some slaves, due to their lack of education and exposure, had an effect on some Muslim women, especially those who accepted educational and spiritual ignorance and stagnancy, and chose to remain at home without working on self-development. The separation and isolation for women was far removed from the culture that the Prophet (pbuh) promoted and encouraged. Furthermore, frequent and continuous wars were another important factor affecting the role of women in Muslim societies.¹¹ Men became more protective of women, and keeping them home was one mechanism

¹¹ The Qur'an describes the negative consequences of war in verse 27:34. Muslim societies continue to face ongoing wars and destruction until today, and more research is needed to analyze the impact it is having on women.

used by men to control dangerous situations, until it eventually became a norm and tradition (Roald 2001). Later, some scholars attempted to quote some verses of the Qur'an and *Hadith* of Prophet Muhammad out of context to support the long-established custom and tradition on religious grounds (Al Alwani 2003; Al Salmi 1997).

On the other hand, modernity had an enormous impact on the legal and cultural systems related to family structure and law, especially in the Muslim world. Amira El Azhary Sonbol presented this issue clearly in her book *Law and Gender Violence in Ottoman and Modern Egypt* by comparing the modern state legal system to the Ottoman court system in Egypt (Sonbol 1996). She explains that the intent of the Ottoman courts was to determine particular disputes and arbitrate marital and personal conflicts, rather than to set generalized statements regarding gender relations. Therefore, Ottoman court decisions differed from one part of Ottoman Egypt to the other depending on the particular *madhab* (schools of Islamic law), local *'urf* (tradition), and socioeconomic standards. Decisions made by judges were based on a standard formula. Modern Egyptian law is based on *ta'liq* (patching), which uses bits and pieces of Western laws along with some Islamic schools of thought according to a plan that fits with the needs of the nation-state paradigm. In modern Egyptian law, for instance, although family relations were originally placed under personal status, when it comes to sex crimes, they have been placed under criminal law. Rather than applying the *hudud* (Islamic laws with unalterable punishments) to rape, modern judges preferred to follow modern laws that are much more lenient towards rapists.

Additionally, women's accessibility to divorce is evidenced in Ottoman court documents, in contrast to modern Egyptian law. During Ottoman times, women found no obstacles in appealing to the *qadi* (judge) for divorce, and it was common for them to receive a favorable judgment (Sonbol 1996). The most important proof needed was to prove that her husband had inflicted any *dharar* (harm) against her. The cases of *dharar* included fear of physical harm, mistreatment of a wife's family members, lack of financial support, a husband's frequent absence from home, and sexual dissatisfaction. During the Ottoman period, the husband had no absolute right to his wife, as was to become the case under modern Egyptian nation-state laws, which currently give a woman little chance of ending the marriage contract against her husband's wishes. Modern Egyptian law emphasizes giving the husband an absolute right to *ta'a* (obedience) from his wife. In the case of violating that obedience, a woman is forced by the police to surrender herself to her husband, even if he is abusive. In comparison, it was documented in the Ottoman court records that the court in Alexandria upheld the divorce of a woman who not only divorced herself by violating her husband's order not to go out, but proceeded to

marry another man after the *'iddah* (three month waiting period following a divorce, to ensure that she is not pregnant, before she can remarry) (Sonbol 1996).¹²

Accordingly, this study attempts to outline a model that is based on Islamic teachings in building positive and peaceful relations, leading to the establishment of new constructive cultures and communities. It is not the purpose of this paper to define cultural and Islamic practices. Rather the focus will be on constructing a model that is based on the Qur'anic and prophetic teachings in regards to building a healthy family, which eventually can be used to examine and evaluate some of the cultural practices.

THE ISLAMIC PARADIGM AND ITS HIGHER VALUES

The coherence of the central belief system in Islam is based on the relationship between the act of submission (to God) and its consequences in a state of peace. At the core of this relationship is the concept of *tawhid* (oneness of God), by virtue of which submission is transformed into a dynamic and ongoing act. That is the meaning of *'ibada* (devotion or worship), which begins by an active commitment to pledge one's being to the fulfillment of the "will of God" in all one undertakes (Abul-Fadl 1991).

God has invested man with His trust as a *khalifah* (vicegerent on earth); the "divine trust" is the fulfillment of the ethical part of the "divine will." As a result, a Muslim, by virtue of submission to *tawhid*, is committed to a lifetime of striving in the way of God to enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong, altogether to fulfill the purpose of humankind's creation as *khalifah* (Al Najjar 1993). The foremost quality of mind and character that flows from this commitment is a state of constant vigilance or an awareness of the presence of God, the "All-Knowing." *Tazkiya*, or purification, is the important process of building this quality of God-consciousness, or *taqwa*. *Taqwa* is at the heart of traits cultivated by the five basic duties of every Muslim, the pillars of Islam.¹³ These basic duties serve to build up the moral character of both the individual and the community. In addition, Qur'anic guidelines focus greatly on defining human relations, especially male-female relations by defining their roles, rights and responsibilities within marital relations, parent-child relations, family care, and with relatives, neighbors, and friends.

¹² For further discussion on the issue of obedience in marriage, and an explication of the relevant Qur'anic verses, see "Gender Relations: Roles and Responsibilities" later in this chapter.

¹³ The five pillars include belief in one God and Prophet Muhammad as His messenger, prayer, fasting, charity, and pilgrimage to Mecca once in a person's lifetime if their finances permit.

The Qur'an also outlines the relationship between human beings and the universe, which is described in hundreds of verses. The relationship that relates the universe to mankind is described in the Qur'an as *taskhir* (meaning that the earth was made subject to humans) (Qur'an 14: 33). On the other hand, human beings are equipped to interact with the universe in a way that actualizes *khilafah* duties and establishes the feelings of closeness and harmony between man and the universe, which is called '*imran*'.¹⁴ The creation of the universe should be utilized to understand the concept of *tawhid* and the significance of human relations. There are laws that govern the universe to maintain balance and functioning, like the system of the food chain, for example, where lower forms of life sustain higher forms of life. Plants sustain animals, both of which sustain humans. The Qur'an describes this connection,

It is He who sends down rain from the sky, from it you drink, and out of it grows the vegetation on which you feed your cattle. With it He produces for you corn, olives, date palms, grapes, and every kind of fruit, verily in which it is a sign for those who give thought. (Qur'an 16:10-14)

The same chapter talks about the relationship between humans and animals,

And the cattle He has created for you (mankind) from them you derive warmth, and numerous benefits, and of their meat you eat. (Qur'an 16:5)

God has created laws or rules that govern our relationships in order to maintain balance and proper functioning. As far as human relationships, we should follow the model of the universe. The Qur'an illustrates this with a visual rendering,

And your Lord taught the bee to build its cells in the hills, on trees, and in people's habitations. Then to eat of all the produce of the earth and find with skill the spacious paths of its Lord, there issues from within their bodies a drink of varying colors, wherein is healing for humankind, verily in this is a sign for those who give thought. It is God who creates you and takes your souls at death, and of you there are some who are sent back to a feeble age, so that they know nothing after having known much for God is All-knowing all-powerful. ...And God has made for you mates and companions of your own nature, and made for you out of them, sons and daughters and grandchildren. And provided for you sustenance of the best. Will they then believe in vain things and be ungrateful for God's favors? (Qur'an 16:68-72)

The picture that the Qur'an illustrates reflects cooperation and a complementary relationship among the bees to fulfill their mission. Similarly, God has provided a mechanism to regulate and balance human relationships by prescribing behaviors

¹⁴ Qur'an 45:13 – "And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth: behold in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect." Also see Qur'an 28:77 – "But seek, with the (wealth) which God has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world: but do thou good, as God has been good to thee, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: for God loves not those who do mischief."

that benefit relationships and prohibiting those that damage relationships. For example, God describes spying, mockery, and back-biting as prohibited behaviors that can destroy relationships,¹⁵ while being honest, trustworthy, truthful, just, and forgiving maintains and strengthens relationships. At the family level, there are rights and responsibilities for each person in the family to observe which further regulate healthy relationships. Human beings are encouraged to learn how to work together in order to accomplish their goals.

THE ISLAMIC VALUE SYSTEM: INTEGRATING LEGAL AND MORAL LAWS

The Islamic value system is unique because it is deeply rooted in the belief system of one God, *tawhid*, the unity of the message for the benefit of humanity among all prophets and messengers, and finally believing in the hereafter, where ultimate justice is served. This set of beliefs maintains balance and stability in all aspects of life because in Islam there is no division between the sacred and the profane (Abul-Fadl 1991). In view of that, the Islamic value system is guided by the principles of the *Shari'ah*, which integrates legal and moral laws. As a result, a Muslim, by virtue of submission to *tawhid*, is committed to a lifetime of striving in the way of God to enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong; altogether to fulfill the purpose of humankind's creation as a *khalifah*. The Islamic value system mainly presents universal principles and values for the benefit of the entire human race; it has universal applicability. For example, honesty, generosity, moderation, justice, patience, and truthfulness, remain positive values or virtues, while greed, extravagance, and oppression have never been considered good or beneficial to society. Although there are Muslims who may conveniently adapt to such norms which are contradictory to the *Shari'ah*, it does not in any way reflect Islamic ideals, but rather is considered deviant behavior.

In the Qur'an, there is special emphasis on certain values that maintain human relationships, especially in a strong and healthy family atmosphere. Some of these values¹⁶ are *taqwa* (piety or God-consciousness), *khayr* (goodness), *birr* (righteousness), *ihsaan* (doing good), *ma'ruf* (kindness and what is known as behavior that is considered socially accepted and does not go against the *Shari'ah* [divine law]), *haqq*

¹⁵ Qur'an 49:11 - "O ye who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others. It may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor let some women laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames: ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used by one) after he has believed: and those who do not desist are (indeed) committing injustice."

¹⁶ It is difficult to translate these values into one or two words because they are concepts that simultaneously contain philosophical and practical meaning.

(truth and right), *`adl* (justice and cooperation)¹⁷, *sabr* (perseverance), *shukr* (gratefulness), *afu*¹⁸ (forgiveness), *musawaah* (equality)¹⁹, and freedom of choice, speech, religion and thought (I. R. Al-Faruqi 1986).²⁰ In contrast, Islam prohibits some values that may lead towards forming negative actions or negatively affecting human relations, such as back biting, suspicion, spying, lying, deceitfulness, dishonesty, etc. (Abugideiri and Alwani 2003).

Islam constantly puts emphasis on the principles and values that Qur'anic teachings uphold as essential to human sustenance and growth. Muslims are required to express these principles and values in the best way that they can, in all aspects of life, private and public.

¹⁷ For example, justice is continuously explained in the Qur'an: "God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion. He instructs you, that you may receive admonition" (Qur'an 16:90). In another example, "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart you from justice. Be just: that is next to piety. And fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that you do" (Qur'an 5:8). Regarding matters at the domestic level, the Qur'an says, "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for God can protect you both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts); lest you swerve and if you distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all that you do" (Qur'an 4:135).

¹⁸ Forgiveness, or *'afu*, in the Qur'an is a goal that needs to be accomplished in order to reach inner peace. The Qur'anic model details an entire process enabling people to reach the highest levels of forgiveness. See Qur'anic verses 42:37-44 and 2:237.

¹⁹ Equality, or *musawaah*, in Islam teaches that all people are created equal in worth and value regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or class. The concept of equality is expressed in the Qur'an as, "O mankind! Reverence your guardian-Lord, who created you from a single soul. Created, of like nature, its mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women—fear God, through whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you), for God ever watches over you" (Qur'an 4:1). The only aspect by which one person is deemed better than another in the sight of God is that of piety, "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you..." (Qur'an 49:13).

²⁰ The Qur'an says, "Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error. Whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold, which never breaks" (Qur'an 2:256). The Qur'an also says, "Say, the truth is from your Lord. Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it): For the wrongdoers We have prepared a fire whose smoke and flames, like the walls and roof of a tent, will hem them in... As to those who believe and work righteousness... for them will be gardens of Eternity, beneath them rivers will flow..." (Qur'an 18:29-31).

SHURA: AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR MODERATION

Shura is an Arabic term for mutual consultation in its widest scope, in which all parties exchange counsel. *Shura* is an important principle rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. The implementation of *shura*, as essentially a decision-making process among equals, was left to the Muslims over centuries to strive and determine the best methods and applications. The principle of *shura* in the Qur'an is based on equality among those consulting in order to reach a collective decision, which is different from *istisharah*, where one side seeks advice from another (Al Shawi 1992).

Prophet Muhammad set the best model for applying the principle of *shura* to every aspect of life as an individual, family member, and community leader based on the Qur'anic teaching, "*And consult them...*" (Qur'an 3:156).²¹ The Qur'an named an entire chapter *al Shura* (consultation) and praised the people, "*...who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation...*" (Qur'an 42:38). The process of *shura* requires freedom; if freedom is lost, especially freedom of thought and speech, then tyranny is the result. *Shura* in itself is liberating for the individual, family, and society. *Shura* provides balance between the freedom of the individual and the system or group. It provides an opportunity for attaining excellence in any society in which the goals and purposes of the *shura* are adhered to, because that society is then established on a variety of opinions and diverse perspectives. This process can only lead to the well-being of the individual, family, and the larger community.

As far as the family is concerned, *shura* is specifically mentioned in the matter of weaning a child of divorced parents. If God insists that divorced parents consult each other regarding their children, then it goes without saying that married parents would do the same. It is interesting to note that breastfeeding is generally considered to be an issue in the "woman's domain," however, God includes the father in the decision-making process. Likewise, many areas that are typically considered to be "men's business," should include the opinion of women, especially when the decisions affect the family directly (Abugideiri and Alwani 2003: 22-23).

The success of the family is dependent on the joint participation and consultation of both parents. Children can be made a part of *shura* meetings regarding any matter that is age-appropriate. In this way, children learn the decision-making process of Islam, which they can carry with them when they are with their peers and

²¹ Qur'an 3:156 – "*It is part of the mercy of God that you deal gently with them, werr you severe or harsh-hearted; they would have broken away from about thee. So pass over their faults and ask for God's forgiveness for them, and consult them in affairs (of moment), then when you hast taken decision, put your trust in God. For God loves those who put their trust in Him.*"

when they become active members of the greater society. Through this process, they also learn skills such as cooperation, communication skills (including listening), and tolerance, all of which are necessary tools for living within a dynamic and diverse society.

GENDER RELATIONS: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

GENDER ROLES

Since the Qur'an clearly explains the mission of mankind on earth as vicegerents of God, gender roles and relations are well defined. To establish an effective vicegerency as individuals, the Qur'an acknowledges *taqwa* (God-conscious piety) as the only distinction among mankind (men and women). The Qur'anic concept *ṣawjiyya* (pairing) is the original and widely used expression in the Qur'an to describe the male-female relationship. Amani Salih explains the concept of *ṣawjiyya* in her article *Pairing and Impairing: Reconceptualizing Gender Through the Qur'an* and suggests that the meaning is a universal concept,

Grounding in a universal cosmogony, *ṣawjiyya* is poised to compass and encompass a dynamic axiology. It declares the meaning of a deep rooted unity and similarity, human equality, interdependence, functional integrity, a fair and balanced system of reciprocities, a right-duty distribution, and a basic social equity between both sexes where merit and due recompense are required and not accredited... With this in view, the Qur'an unequivocally denies the inevitability of a confrontation between the sexes and dislodges traditional male-bounded authoritarian theories on the gender question. (Salih 2002, 6)

The Qur'an establishes the concept of equality in 4:1,

O mankind! Reverence your guardian-Lord, who created you from a single soul. Created, of like nature, its mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women—fear God, through whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you), for God ever watches over you.

The verse outlines the foundation of gender relations as *wilayah*²² (protectors of each other), and defines the relationship between men and women as partners (*awliya'*) in establishing a healthy family and society. It further expands that concept to give each person (male and female) equal responsibility for their actions and fulfillment

²² The concept of *wilayah* is explained in chapter *al Tawbah* where God says, "Men and women are protectors of one another. They enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil, they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity and obey God and his messenger, on them will God pour his mercy for God is exalted in power, wise" (Qur'an 9:71).

of religious duties (Alwani 2006). Therefore, this variance does not negate the principle of equality; rather it is a sign of social complement and solidarity between people. Each gender has special qualities that, in general, lead each gender to be better qualified for a particular role. Due to the fact that women have the exclusive ability and responsibility for the continuation of humanity's existence, men must fulfill the financial responsibility to maintain stability and balance in the family and society. Moreover, the roles are not mutually exclusive. It is a natural part of life for variance to exist between people concerning their strengths, abilities and qualifications.

THE ISSUE OF QIWAMA AND ITS IMPLICATION ON GENDER RELATIONS: AN ANALYTICAL READING

Throughout Islamic history, Muslim scholars have been discussing the meaning of verse 4:34, depending on the historical and cultural context in which they lived. Due to the influence of modernity on Islamic societies, since the end of the nineteenth century until today the verse has been subject to a great deal of controversy among Muslims,

Men are Qawwamun over women, because God has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because of the sustenance they provide from their own means. Therefore the righteous women (as-salihat) are devoutly obedient (qanitat), and guard what God would have them guard (hafidhat lil-ghayb)... (Qur'an 4:34-35)

Some of the contemporary Muslim scholars²³ explain the verse by emphasizing the male's treatment of the female. The verse establishes the fundamental obligation for men, with regard to women, to create a balanced and shared society. The word *qawwamun* was mentioned in only three verses in the entire Qur'an; two of them call upon believing men and women to establish justice as an ultimate goal in any situation,

O you who believe stand out firmly for Justice as witnesses to God even as against your parents, or your kin, or whether it be against rich or poor. Follow not the lusts (of your heart)... (Qur'an 4:135)

The second verse states,

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart you from justice. Be just: that is next to piety. And fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that you do. (Qur'an 5:8)

²³ For an in-depth discussion of verse 4:34, review the commentary of Muhammad Abduh and Rasheed Rida in the *tafseer* (exegesis) of *Al-Manar*, Sayyid Qutb in *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, and Al Taher Ibn Ashur in his *tafseer Al Tabreer wal Tanweer*.

Therefore, *qawwamun* in verse 4:34 refers to men's responsibility toward women to be fair and compassionate, as Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) exemplified through his sayings and actions. In Islam men are responsible for maintaining the family financially, and providing for a broad range of needs, including spiritual, emotional, and educational needs. Without this divine injunction, some men may not fulfill their financial responsibility towards their family (Abugideiri and Alwani 2003).

If we look at the verses holistically, it becomes especially clear that the concept of *faddala*, which means to prefer, is not absolute preference, but is relative. Since the Qur'an distinguishes between individuals or groups on the basis of deeds, and does not set values for particular deeds, the preference in this verse may go either way. It can be interpreted that some men who fulfill their duties are preferred over others who do not; and in that case, it also applies to women, meaning that some women are preferred over other women. According to the Qur'anic value system, the deed is still considered the main dimension, even if the preference is among men and women (Qur'an 49:13).

In the same verse, God describes the positive characteristics of righteous women: *qinoot*, (devoutly obedient) as the highest spiritual dignity that is not restricted to gender; interestingly, it was chosen to describe women in this verse. By examining the Qur'anic usage of *qinoot*, one finds that this characteristic establishes a strong bond between men and women through virtues and qualities in *Surah al-Ahzab* (Qur'an 33:35). In addition, the Qur'an describes special women as *qanitat*, such as Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ (Qur'an 66:12), the Prophet Muhammad's wives (Qur'an 33:31), and finally, as a description of women in general (Qur'an 33:35 and 4:34). Therefore, *qinoot* does not indicate the obedience of the wife to her husband, as was suggested by some Muslim scholars. It means that when the wife is obedient to God, and strives to be a good worshipper, she will fulfill her obligations towards her husband and children in the best manner. The emphasis of some scholars on the wife's obedience to her husband, and their effort to connect that with her submission to God, later turned into an absolute obedience, where a man can exercise his ultimate authority.

The third characteristic identified in 4:34 describes women as *hafidhat lil-ghayb* - they guard what God would have them guard. This indicates that women, as worshippers, are capable of guarding their chastity, mainly for the sake of God. Yet some scholars again linked this with the power of the husband. For this reason, many Muslim societies believe that women are *fitnah*, a source of temptation, and that they are weak. Consequently, they are always in need of male protection. However, the Qur'an in this verse proved that righteous women are very capable of guarding their chastity by submitting themselves to God's ruling. As a result, men and women are partners in the endeavor of maintaining a healthy family unit in which children are raised to be God-conscious members of society (Abugideiri and Alwani 2003).

QUR'ANIC TEACHINGS AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

As Muslims conquered different lands, they often kept the local political, economic, social, and cultural powers intact, because the main concern was to establish strong human relations guided by Divine ethical and moral systems. Islam's objectives were not to eliminate or abolish indigenous people's cultures or civilizations, but to provide guidance that would lead to humankind's enhancement and happiness as vicegerents on earth. Islam invites people to be good representatives by taking care of each other and the universe (Qur'an 33:72). The integration between human understanding of the text and culture has had an effect on Islamic legislation (Roald 2001). The historical development of Islamic law is an indication of how interpretations of social issues in Islamic sources are the result of dynamic interactions between Islamic scholars and society. It came into being as a result of interpreting sources in different contexts, with specific local traditions (*'urf*) constituting the moral norms of society having an influence on the legislation. Today, local moral customs (*'urf*) differ from those of ancient Arab society and from one society to another, so tension is created between what is legal and what is moral (Roald 2001).

Unfortunately, some Muslim individuals and societies have maintained different types of cultural values that violate the Qur'anic model. One example is tribal traditional, male-bounded, authoritarian, and male dominated culture, where women have an inferior position, as evidenced by limited legal rights or limited involvement in society. On the other hand, for over a century, the Western paradigm and its liberal feminist movement played a serious role in calling women to have an identical role to men, which can lead to the promotion of a unisex society and blurs the distinction between genders. Because it is quite different from the stated value in Western society that confuses equality with sameness, many non-Muslims misinterpret the Islamic concept of complementary roles as being oppressive to women. Islam values a dual sex society where each gender has equally valuable, but sometimes different roles (L. Al-Faruqi 1988). Islamic attitudes towards such social concerns as gender relations and the issue of *qiwama* emerge as responsive to culture and context, rather than rigid and inflexible, as is often perceived. Ann Sofie Roald's book *Women in Islam* illustrates how the cultural encounter between Islam and the West sometimes gives rise to fresh interpretation of Islamic texts, especially with regards to the issue of *qiwama* (Roald 2001). It is important to notice that the structure of the Muslim family is part of a larger context within the overall paradigm of Islam, where the values mentioned earlier regulate and protect family functioning.

It is time to establish cultures that revive the teachings of the Qur'an and follow the model of the first generation of Muslims in Medina. In Medina, men and women worked together to build a healthy society. Fulfilling the objectives of *Shari'ah* in establishing justice, promoting tolerance and peace, and creating balance and stability in life according to the teachings of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, is obligatory.

THE STRUCTURE OF FAMILY RELATIONS

Islam views the family as the cornerstone of human society, unlike the Western paradigm in which the individual is considered the main unit. This perspective has a great impact on the way family relations are structured and how they operate in both paradigms. Consequently, Islam establishes systems in order to preserve a balance between the rights and the responsibilities of the individual, the family, and the community. Although the nuclear family is significant in Islam, it is the extended family that is truly a mini-*Ummah* (world-wide Muslim community) (L. Al-Faruqi 1988). With the implementation of Islam in its comprehensive nature, the healthy extended family provides the moral support necessary for the mental health of each individual, and an environment leading to the prevention of family dysfunction (L. Al-Faruqi 1990).²⁴ Even though the Qur'an defines a general structure for the family, each family preserves its uniqueness as a result of various cultures, educational backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses, among other factors.

FAMILY SYSTEMS

The Qur'an established a system to preserve the balance in the family. The objectives of the family are achieved through four systems:

- 1) *Mahrim*. Restriction and clear description of male-female relationships through the concept of *mahrim*, meaning that marriage is prohibited between two people who can be categorized as each other's *mahrim* (Qur'an 4:23-24).²⁵ For example, a brother and a sister cannot marry each other. These prohibited categories are listed in detail in chapters "*al-Nisa*" and "*al-Nur*." People in these categories also have certain obligations towards each other socially, economically, etc. The responsibility of each person in this category towards each other is well-defined.
- 2) Inheritance (Qur'an 4:7-13, 176): Individuals in the *mahrim* category have certain responsibilities regarding inheritance that must be observed. For ex-

²⁴ The Qur'anic terminology for advice is also known as "*amr bil ma'ruf wal naby an almunkar*," or "enjoining what is just and good, and forbidding what is evil" (Qur'an 3:104).

²⁵ For more on the legal and moral rules related to this system, see Qur'anic verse 24:31.

ample, a father must be financially responsible for his children, wife, and parents if they are in need. When the father dies, the children, wife, and the parents are guaranteed to inherit from him. In addition, brothers, uncles, and grandfathers may substitute the father's financial responsibility toward the women in his family in case of his absence. The inheritance system is closely intertwined with the concept of *mahrim* and the inheritor's financial responsibilities. Without connecting the inheritance system to the responsibilities of a *mahrim*, inheritance becomes a purely material issue, rather than a moral issue that takes emotional, spiritual and psychological implications into consideration. By specifying clear cut entitlement and specific shares for female relatives, Islam not only elevated the position of women, but simultaneously safeguarded their social and economic interests. By carefully studying the system of inheritance, one can find that all shares are based on the role and relationship of each member of the family to the deceased, not on their gender. The mother, for example, in some cases may have a share that is higher than the father, or vice-versa, not because of her gender, but because of her role as a mother.²⁶ Furthermore, to better understand the inheritance system, the following points should be known:²⁷

- a. Women receive half of men's shares in four cases only: when a parent dies and leaves behind a daughter and a son, when the deceased leaves behind his/her parents and is unmarried and without children, when the deceased leaves behind only brothers and sisters, and the case of spouses. The primary reasoning behind the inheritance system in Islam corresponds with the inheritor's financial responsibilities. Men, in Islamic law, are responsible for the women in their family, especially their mothers, daughters, wives, and sisters. For example, sons may inherit more than daughters because it is his duty to financially care for his sisters.

²⁶ Discussions regarding inheritance between the companions of Prophet Muhammad made it very clear that the primary focus is on the individual role rather than gender. Ibn Abbas, one of the prophet's companions known for his interpretation of the Qur'an, explains the rights of mothers over their children, and connects those rights with the mothers' share, thereby deciding to give the mother more than the father in certain cases. Ibn Abbas's argument is cited in most *fiqhi* literature regarding inheritance, especially in Ibn Hazim Al Andalusī's book *Kitab al-Muhallā bi'l Athār*.

²⁷ Also see Salah Sultan's book on *Women's Inheritance in Islam: Freedom or Oppression?* and view his commentary on inheritance at www.islamonline.net.

- b. In many cases, women receive the same share of inheritance as men, such as is the case when the deceased leaves behind his parents and his children, then his mother inherits the same share as his father.
- c. In 10 cases or more, the women's share is larger than men's. For example, the highest share for anyone is two-thirds of the wealth, which is designated only for women in many situations (Sultan 2004, 12-22).

In other words, in more than 30 cases, women receive the same amount of inheritance, or more, than men do; in some cases receiving shares while men do not. There are only four definitive cases in which women receive half of the men's share. In conclusion, the inheritance system must be studied in a comprehensive way.

- 3) Marriage: There are values and objectives related to this institution. Most important is that the couple lives together in peace, with mercy and compassion between them.
- 4) Divorce²⁸: The Qur'an covers divorce in great detail, so that when the family separates, it separates in peace. The rights of each family member are preserved, but especially the children's rights.

The following sections will analyze marriage, divorce, and parent-child relations. The author attempts to examine those relationships in order to find the factors and elements that lead to a healthy marriage, as well as a peaceful divorce when divorce becomes necessary.

THE TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE IN ISLAM

With regard to male-female relationships, Islam proclaimed the normal pattern as consisting of their cohabitation under "Divine Law." The Creator constituted humanity into males and females, established mutual affection between them, and prepared them to find quiescence and love in each other. The foundation of an Islamic marriage is described in the following verse from the Qur'an,

And among His signs is this: that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts). Verily in that are signs for those who reflect. (Qur'an 30:21)

²⁸ In the Qur'an, issues of divorce are discussed in Chapter 65, entitled "The Divorce," in addition to a number of verses in Chapter 4, "The Women," and in Chapter 2, "The Cow." Titles of Qur'anic chapters have methodological meanings that reflect either a particular theme or emphasize the importance of specific concepts or issues.

This verse refers to the main objective of *Shari'ah* for marriage, which is to establish *sakina* (roughly translated as tranquility). Other linguistic meanings are: to become still, peaceful, to be reassured, to soothe, calmness, and even to dwell or inhabit. Therefore, marriage becomes a place of repose, to be soothed and calmed, far away from the commotion of the world. To further enrich this concept of tranquility, God speaks of another of His favors that He put in the hearts of spouses: love and mercy for each other. This verse further specifies the purpose of marriage and characterizes the union in which each spouse is responsible for bringing tranquility into the marriage. It is a reminder that each spouse is inherently equal, and that the union between them is a peaceful and compassionate one.

In order to protect the human race and society, same-sex relations, fornication, and adultery, in all their forms, are Islamically prohibited. Even celibacy, though honorable in intention, is forbidden due to the biological nature of human beings and their need for human companionship. Muslims view marriage as noble and universally necessary because it brings quiescence, progeny, and continuation of life with purity and responsibility. God said: "*They are your libas (garments) and you are their garments*" (Qur'an 2:187). Linguistically, the term *libas* means dress, garments, being on intimate terms, apparel, and robes. Within the context of its usage in this verse, the term *libas* takes on a subtle intimate shade. Functionally, a garment protects one from the dirt and grime of the outside world, and also serves as a cover for nakedness. Furthermore, garments are the closest to our bodies, wrapping and protecting us in comfort. Being naturally conscious of appearance, many people take time to choose the style, fit, color, and appropriateness of each garment they wear, as well as the time to clean, iron, and generally maintain their wardrobes. When the various meanings of *libas* are translated into the context of a relationship, the parallels are obvious. Men and women are mutual garments for each other, and this is an appropriate point to stress. They cover each other's weaknesses, serve as a protection and comfort from the harsh elements of reality, and safeguard the precious intimacy and secrets shared between them. Naturally, given the immense sacredness of marriage, one should ensure selecting a spouse carefully, and also have the willingness to nurture the relationship, all of which require patience and perseverance (Balala 2004).

In Islam, marriage is an act of worship, and the goal of each person within the marriage is first and foremost to please God. Any behavior or interaction done with the intent of upholding divine instruction will be rewarded by God in the hereafter and will contribute to a healthy family unit.

The marriage contract is very important for both parties in Islam; all its elements should be discussed and negotiated wisely. The marriage contract is not considered a sacrament; rather it is a civil agreement whose terms may be anything agreeable to the two parties. In order to be valid, a contract must include, besides the spouses' express consent, specification of an immediate and a deferred dowry given to the wife by the husband. This dowry serves as a deterrent, as well as an

insurance policy against the husband's arbitrary decision to terminate the marriage (I. Al-Faruqi and L. Al-Faruqi 1986).

From the initial formation of the family unit, beginning with the process of engagement and marriage, Islam has provided the ideal criteria to look for in a spouse, who should have the competence and qualifications necessary to be the cornerstone of the family's foundation. Both spouses, man and woman, must be able to work together in their complementary roles to establish this important institution. The selection of a spouse involves investigation and getting to know each other well because it is crucial for the husband and wife to work as constructive partners who will assist each other in implementing divine laws. In the *Cultural Atlas of Islam* Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi and Lois Lamya Al-Faruqi explain,

Sex and procreation carry no stigma, being in them natural like food, growth, and death, and having been instituted by God as integral elements of the process of existence and life, the very medium and material of ethics and religion. (I. Al-Faruqi and L. Al-Faruqi 1986, 149)

In the Qur'an God says,

Your wives are as a tilth unto you, so approach your tilth when or how you will; but do some good act for your souls beforehand; and fear God, and know that you will meet Him (in the hereafter) and give (these) good tidings to those who believe. (Qur'an 2:223)

This verse illustrates a beautiful portrait in explaining one of the most delicate matters: the importance of sexual relationships among spouses. It is as solemn a fact as any in life, and it is a serious affair for both spouses. The man sows the seeds in order for both of them to reap the harvest. They both choose the time and the mode of cultivation. The husband should not sow out of season nor cultivate in a manner which will injure or exhaust the soil. He must be kind, wise, and considerate, and every kind of mutual consideration is required; but above all, this verse, along with many other verses regarding sexual relations, highlights the spiritual aspects (Qur'an 2:187, 222). All these injunctions elevate the act of sexual intercourse from its carnal origins to a beautifully sacred mandate, grounded in spiritual underpinnings. The image of a woman being a sexual object to simply please men's appetites is eradicated and replaced with a solemn dictate for a man to approach his wife in an appropriately spiritual and thoughtful manner.

The goal of marriage is to broaden the circle of relationships between people, extending families through in-laws, lineage and procreation. In order to protect the rights of women and children, there are certain conditions that have to be met, such as the marriage contract and publicizing the marriage. In addition, the Qur'an emphasizes the traditional marriage between a man and a woman, with two witnesses. The Qur'an is very strict in these matters, although the Islamic scholars'

debates suggest minimizing some of the restrictions, such as limiting the conditions to having witnesses and a contract without publicizing it.²⁹ Careful analysis and consideration of the outcome and the *maslaha*³⁰ of the family when some imams or jurists issue legal judgments, or *fatawa*, and how they may positively or negatively impact the family is required, as the first generations of jurists suggested (Ibn Ashur 1970).

The fulfillment of the role of each individual as a *khalifah* (vicegerent or representative) must begin in the family because this fulfillment is dependent on interactions (*mu'amalat*) with others. It is through the family that the balance between the needs of the individual and the needs of the group can be achieved and maintained. It is in the family that the initial bonds of *ukhuwwa* (brotherhood) are established and developed, when every member of the family lives according to divine rules under the umbrella of *tawhid* (oneness of God).

NUSHUZ: THE DISTURBANCE OF TRANQUILITY

The main objective of *Shari'ah* regarding marriage is to live in tranquility and harmony with each other, and to build healthy family relationships (Qur'an 30:21). In order to fulfill those objectives in different situations, the Qur'an provides a full process that offers effective techniques in dealing with marital disputes. The Qur'an uses the word *nushuz* to refer to unacceptable behavior that leads to a dispute, either due to a lack of commitment to the marital relationship or to immoral behavior. The Qur'an uses the concept of *nushuz* for both the husband and wife, and it provides a remedy for both parties in different circumstances, with the ultimate goal being a resolution of the problem and preservation of the family (Abugideiri and Alwani 2003). If that is not possible, then divorce is permissible. As the Qur'an states,

²⁹ Historically, Shiites have believed in *mut'aa* (temporary marriage), which has its own rules and regulations. However, nowadays some Sunni imams allow similar types of marriages (*misyar*, *'urfi*, friendship, and others) under certain circumstances. In such marriages, women may sacrifice some of their rights, such as divinely ordained financial support, or the condition of publicizing the marriage. Such temporary marriages can help to overcome some societal problems, by addressing them in a way other than by violating the conditions of traditional Islamic marriages.

³⁰ *Al Mustasfa Min Usul Al fiqh* by Imam Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) is one of the most important books in the field of *usul*. It provides the clearest framework for defining *al maslaha*. *Maslaha* is an expression for seeking something useful (*manfa'a*), or removing something harmful (*madarra*). There are three types of *maslaha*: *mu'tabarrah* (accredited), *mulghat* (discredited) if the *maslaha* contradicts the text, and *mursalah* if there is no evidence to support or contradict it.

If a wife fears cruelty (nushuz) or desertion on her husband's part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves, and such settlement is best....but if they disagree (and must part), God will provide for all from His far-reaching bounty. For God is He that cares for all and is Wise. (Qur'an 4:128-130)

In the case of the wife, Muhammad Asad's English translation of verse 4:34 reads,

And as for those women whose ill-will (nushuz) you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then hit them (lightly) (daraba); and if thereupon they pay you heed,³¹ do not seek to harm them. Behold, God is indeed most high, great! And if you have reason to fear that a breach might occur between a [married] couple, appoint an arbiter from among his people and an arbiter from among her people; if they both want to set things aright, God may bring about their reconciliation. Behold, God is indeed all-knowing, aware. (Qur'an 4:34-35)

Men who beat their wives often quote this verse to support their abuse. Yet, a thorough understanding of this verse cannot be achieved without examining the context of the overall message of the Qur'an, viewing it in light of the culture and traditions in existence during that time, and through Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) behavior and attitudes towards women.

In case of marital disorder, the Qur'an suggests different steps to reach the ultimate solution in resolving the conflict peacefully. Verse 4:34, coupled with 4:35, outlines five steps: for the husband and wife to talk about the problem, to sleep separately (preferably without the knowledge of the children), chastisement or separation, arbitration, and reconciliation or divorce. The steps that are outlined in verses 4:34-35 serve to prevent problems from escalating, and it is forbidden to skip from one step to another without exhausting every possible element in the previous step. There is a verbal solution, which it seems is the one preferred by the Qur'an, because it is discussed in both situations (Qur'an 4:34, 4:128), and particularly agrees with the principle of *shura* (mutual consultation). Verse 4:34 encourages a return to marital harmony; if the steps are followed as suggested, it is possible to regain order before the final step of divorce. Today, the success of the suggested model of this verse has been proven by Muslim researchers who work in the field of conflict resolution by applying this verse as a foundation for building Islamic models in solving conflicts among individuals and communities (Abdalla 2000-2001).

Cultural traditions enacted in pre-Islamic Arabia included physically abusing, inheriting, and even murdering women to maintain "honor." In one *hadith*, Omar ibn Al Khattab narrated that before Islam, the practice of beating women was common, even when there was no blame being placed on the women (Sahih Al Bukhari, Book of Marriage Hadith #4805). Verse 4:19 highlights the tradition of

³¹ Abdullah Yusuf Ali translates this as "if they return to obedience," meaning obedience towards God, not her husband.

men inheriting women as property, which was practiced before the Qur'an was revealed. Under such circumstances, widows could be "inherited" by a brother-in-law or even a step-son (Abugideiri and Alwani 2003). Women suspected of adultery were frequently murdered by their husbands (Abugideiri and Alwani 2003). Given the cultural context at the time the Qur'an was revealed, verse 4:34 should be taken as prohibiting unchecked violence against females. In one *hadith*, upon hearing of the Qur'anic ruling requiring four witnesses be present in order to be able to prove adultery, Sa'ad ibn Ubadah, a companion of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), became angry and frustrated at the thought of having to wait for four witnesses to confirm adultery, saying that if his own wife committed adultery he would want to kill them both, without having to wait for four witnesses (Sahih Muslim, Book of *Li'an*, Hadith #2754). Even if ibn Ubadah had seen his wife commit adultery with his own eyes, the Qur'an rules that the system of *mula'ana* (verses 24:6-10) must be followed, one based on verbal oaths of truth and/or innocence by each spouse, each of which must be accepted. Indeed, *mula'ana* shows that the Islamic system of *hudood* is not based on physical punishment, but rather encourages people to have *taqwa*, or inner reflection.

In *What Islam Says About Domestic Violence*, Salma Abugideiri and Zainab Alwani highlight Prophet Muhammad's behavior towards his wives,

Looking at the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as an example of how these serious problems could be addressed is very informative. He was known for never hitting a woman or a child and for being strongly against the use of any type of violence. In reference to men who use violence at home, the Prophet said, "Could any of you beat his wife as he would beat a slave, and then lie with her in the evening?" He also said, "Never beat God's handmaidens (female believers)." He was a man whom his wife described as having internalized the teachings of the Qur'an in his character and personality. The Prophet himself was put in several situations where he could have beaten his wives had he chosen to apply the verses with the literal interpretation. His wives sometimes caused him a lot of trouble, conspiring against him out of jealousy for another wife. Once, his wife Aisha was even accused of adultery by some members of the community. In none of these situations did he ever raise a hand or even his voice. He gave his wives options when they complained, and allowed Aisha to stay at her father's house for one month at her request, until her innocence was established. (Abugideiri and Alwani 2003, 31)

In another instance, Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) wives became upset with the frugal lifestyle they lived and his unwillingness to seek material gain. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was known and respected for his lack of interest in materialism, and preferred to focus on spirituality, charity, and doing good. Rather than becoming angry or abusive at their insistence, he separated himself from his wives for one month, with the understanding that they were free to leave the marriage if they preferred a higher standard of living. They all chose to remain.

In light of that action, Abdulhamid Abusulayman, a contemporary researcher, analyzed verse 4:34 within the overall framework of the Qur'an and concluded that in this context, the Arabic word "*daraba*" does not mean "beat" but rather the temporary separation of a husband from his wife (Abusulayman 2003). In his book *Marital Discord: Recapturing the Full Islamic Spirit of Human Dignity*, Abusulayman explicates the meaning of the word *daraba* in verse 4:34 and analyzes its derivatives as used in seventeen places in the Qur'an. Abusulayman believes that understanding *daraba* to mean that a man should leave a situation of marital disharmony, rather than beat his wife, provides more consistency with the concept of restoring marital harmony, as beating would surely escalate the situation, while leaving the situation gives the spouses an opportunity to reflect.

Dr. Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, a leading contemporary Muslim jurist, says,

...jurists consider the purposes of marriage when deriving rulings from these verses. The general purposes of marriage include fulfilling the conditions needed for living in tranquility and harmony, building family relationships and networks, and procreation. Application of teachings from the Qur'an must not undermine these goals. Sometimes, jurists apply the literal meaning of a verse when that meaning will achieve these goals; other times they apply the spirit of a verse if the literal meaning hinders the achievement of these goals... in modern societies today, the third step in the process ("beating" the wife), is not to be applied because the circumstances of today's society are different from the society in which the Qur'an was revealed... Emphasis is placed on the spirit of the verse, which is the protection of the family unit from a real threat to its survival. In today's world, beating one's wife would surely lead to the very destruction of the family unit that this verse seeks to preserve. (Abugideiri and Alwani 2003, 29-30)

In conclusion, marriage in Islam should be based on harmony, love and mercy (Qur'an 30:21). Any act of oppression by the couple that violates marital tranquility and peace is prohibited. Therefore, the Qur'an presents a balanced model that can be applicable to different societies. It develops methods for resolving conflict through open discussion, mutual consultation, mediation and arbitration. In the event that all efforts fail to resolve the problem, divorce can be considered as a final resort.

DIVORCE: A PEACEFUL SOLUTION FOR A FAILED MARRIAGE

In Islam the divorce system is very comprehensive, legally and morally (Qur'an 65 and 2:227-243). Divorce is considered to be a family safeguard when the husband and the wife fail to maintain a happy and healthy marriage. It is allowed as a last resort after exhausting all efforts in resolving the conflict. The Qur'an clearly defines the rights and responsibilities of each member involved in the process. Emphasis is placed on ensuring spousal and children's rights, acknowledging that these rights are often abused. God constantly reminds the husband especially, to

treat the wife at the time of divorce with *ma'ruf*. This term springs from many sources such as *'a-ra-fa* (to know, be cognizant, perceive, and recognize), and also *'urf* (kindness, beneficence, tradition, custom). *Ma'ruf* is the moral representation that balances the legal settlement at the time of divorce. Many Qur'anic verses dealing with divorce, roughly Qur'an 2: 223-242 and also the chapter on *talaq* (divorce) include the concept of *ma'ruf* multiple times; the closing of such verses includes an admonition to remember God. Taken in this context, we find that the concept of *ma'ruf* is delicately tied to a higher awareness of God; this consciousness dictates that there is no limit to the kindness we bestow on others, even at the most difficult point of separation, when cruelty and bitterness may reach their height. In Islam, the issue of divorce is a serious matter and is considered a responsibility of the whole community. At the end of the Qur'anic chapter "The Divorce," Allah warns Muslims that if they do not follow his commands then,

How many populations that insolently opposed the command of their Lord and of His messengers did We not then call to severe account? And We imposed on them an exemplary punishment? (Qur'an 65:8)

Divorce can be initiated individually by either party or by mutual agreement, but the procedure and process varies depending on who initiates the divorce, as well as the circumstances surrounding the divorce. The Qur'an thoroughly explains possible solutions when the marriage comes to an end. Many Muslims may not be knowledgeable about the Islamic legal process related to divorce, and they may have some misconceptions about procedural details, as well as the rights of each party in the event of a divorce. In most cases, an imam or religious scholar will be consulted to make sure the correct procedure is followed (Abugideiri and Alwani 2003, 33-36). The Qur'an outlines a legal and moral set of laws for all the parties involved in the process (Abd al Ati 1977).

- 1) The first type of divorce is called *talaq*, in which the husband pronounces, "I divorce you" three times (L. al Faruqi 1988). There are strict rules and conditions to make this type of divorce valid:
 - a. When the husband pronounces the divorce, he should be mindful of his decision. The divorce is considered invalid if he is extremely angry or under the influence of an intoxicant. The Qur'an also restricts the husband's ability to divorce the same wife repeatedly. It says,

A divorce is permissible only twice; after that, the husbands should either retain their wives together on equitable terms or let them go with kindness, ma'ruf. It is not lawful for you to take back any of your gifts... (Qur'an 2:229)

followed in Chapter 4 by,

But if ye decide to take one wife in place of another, even if ye had given the latter a whole treasure for dower, take not the least bit of it back: Would ye take it by slander

and manifest wrong? And how could ye take it when ye have gone in unto each other, and they have taken from you a solemn covenant? (Qur'an 4:21)

Here the term *ifdha'a* is used, which means establishing a deep connection and intimate knowledge of each other. A husband is reminded not to take back the dowry, or any gifts bestowed on his wife at the time of separation, to give respect to the intimacy they once shared.

- b. To be a valid divorce the pronouncement must be made in front of two witnesses.
- c. The wife is required to fulfill the '*iddah*' (waiting or testing period), during which she continues to live in her marital residence with her husband, but without having any sexual relations. This period is provided to allow for any opportunities of reconciliation, and to determine if there is a pregnancy, in which case the waiting period is extended until childbirth. It also allows time for the wife to make plans for her future living arrangements. If this time period comes to an end without mutual desire for reconciliation, then the divorce is final (Abd al Ati 1977).

The wife can also initiate divorce proceedings against her husband if there is cause, which the *Shari'ah* defines as incompatibility, cruelty, injustice, prolonged absence, adultery, insanity, and incurable or contagious diseases (Sonbol 1996). In this type of divorce, when the husband emotionally or physically harms his wife, the husband bears total financial responsibility to pay his wife's delayed dowry in full, as well as for the three months of her '*iddah*', or waiting period (to confirm that she is not pregnant). Additionally, if she is pregnant, the father bears total financial responsibility for her during her pregnancy, as well as for their unborn child.

- 2) *Khul'* is another term used in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* to end the marital relationship. If a woman initiates divorce in the absence of any cruelty or mistreatment, she forfeits her right to keep any gifts, including her dowry. The wife of Thabit ibn Qais (one of the companions of the Prophet) came to the Messenger (pbuh) and said,

"Oh Messenger of God! I do not blame Thabit for any defects in his character or his religion, but I cannot endure to live with him." The messenger asked her, "Will you return his garden? This was given to you as dowry." She said, "Yes." Then the prophet said to Thabit, "Accept the garden and talaqha [release her with one divorce pronouncement]." (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book of Divorce, Hadith #4867; Bin Majah, Book of Divorce, Hadith #2046)

- 3) Another type of divorce occurs after writing the marriage contract and assigning the dowry, but before having marital relations. In this case, if the

husband decides to break the contract, the wife should have half of the dowry unless she forgives him and decides to waive her right (Qur'an 2:237).

- 4) In the case of dissolving the engagement before writing the contract, the husband should bestow a suitable gift on her (Qur'an 2:236).
- 5) Another type of marriage dissolution occurs when the husband accuses his wife of committing the crime of adultery. In this case it is called *li'an* or *al mula'anah*, which is based on an oath made by both the husband and wife that they speak the truth (Qur'an 24:1-20). According to Islamic law, the issue of committing adultery or fornication is a very serious matter, and there are detailed rules and laws to establish justice for all parties involved. The Qur'an deals seriously and strictly with the issues of slander or scandal. One of the important objectives of *Shari'ah* is to preserve people's honor, or *'iridh* in Arabic. Therefore, if something is said against a woman's chastity, it must be supported by four witnesses, which is twice as strong as would be required for business transactions, or even murder cases (see the footnote for verse 24:4 in Yusuf Ali's Qur'anic translation).

However, in the case of spousal accusation, the Qur'an deals with the issue differently, and the case of *li'an* occurs if the husband sees his wife committing adultery. First, the requirement of four witnesses is replaced with an oath of truth by the husband, and an oath of innocence by the wife. Second, the husband cannot be punished for making a false accusation. Third, by the wife taking an oath of innocence, even if adultery actually occurred, since it cannot be proven, the honor of the wife and their children will be protected. Fourth, the marriage relationship will be resolved peacefully. (In social systems prior to Islam, solutions to this situation included accepting the word of the husband, and killing the accused wife and her alleged lover). Fifth, if the woman becomes pregnant after she is accused of infidelity by her husband, whether she actually committed adultery or not, the rights of the unborn child must be protected. (DNA testing today may identify the father, but there are different *fiqhi* (juristic) opinions regarding who should ask for the test, and how to balance the benefits and the damage that can be caused by the process for all members of the family). Sixth, if the child's father is unknown, Islamically the mother's family is fully responsible for raising the child in the best manner possible. Seventh, Islam also holds the community and society accountable for helping to raise the child in a healthy environment, without causing any psychological or mental distress because of possible parental wrongdoing. The system is comprehensive to protect the rights of all family members, especially the women and children (Qur'an 24:6-10). From an Islamic perspective, this system is another example of the significant role of family, as the essence of society.

In conclusion, the Qur'an emphasizes ensuring spousal and children's rights, and acknowledges that these rights are often abused. When implemented according to the Islamic guidelines, the rules are actually for the benefit of women and children who may otherwise have a great deal of difficulty surviving in certain social and cultural contexts. For that reason, the Qur'an holds not only each spouse accountable for making sure these rights are not violated, but also warns the entire community of being punished if these rights are not upheld.³² Today, in many cultures that are predominantly Muslim, women may experience difficulty obtaining a divorce from the court, and face tremendous pressure from the culture, even if they have been abused (Abugideiri and Alwani 2003). For the Western Muslim community, in order to establish justice, it is the religious leadership's responsibility to educate the Muslim community to better understand Islamic guidelines and local civil laws regarding marriage and divorce.

CHILD CUSTODY

Islamic law objectives mainly emphasize the benefit of the child in regards to child custody. The divorce process usually causes stress and anger, especially concerning the children, and the Qur'an addresses this issue seriously. In order to minimize anger and hatred, the Qur'an offers a comprehensive plan based on promoting *taqwa* (God-consciousness and forgiveness). The healing process that leads to forgiveness includes focusing on the positive aspects that existed in the relationship, controlling one's anger to avoid acting unjustly, and increasing one's prayers (Qur'an 2:237-238). Parents should avoid involving the children in their conflict and from using the children to get back at each other (Abugideiri and Alwani 2003).

There are different opinions among the major Muslim schools of thought regarding child custody. The child's age and gender are important factors. For very young children, most scholars agree that they should remain with their mother. It is recommended by most of the schools of thought to have boys live with their fathers after the age of 7 to 9; while girls should remain with their mothers (Zydan 1993). The rationale here is that children benefit from living with the parent of the same gender in order to have a role model and to be socialized properly. Furthermore, because determining custody is primarily based on the welfare of the child, some scholars have suggested evaluating both environments and both parents, as well as their parenting skills, and then reaching a decision that ultimately serves the child's welfare.

³² Qur'an 65:8 – "How many populations that insolently opposed the command of their Lord and of His messengers did We not then call to severe account? And We imposed on them an exemplary punishment?"

THE REALM OF CHILD-PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Clearly defining the rights and responsibilities in different relationships leads to minimizing conflict and building a healthy environment. The Qur'an explicitly explains the rights and obligations for children and parents under different circumstances (Qur'an 31:12-19, 17:23-25, 46:17-19, and 29:8). The duties of parents begin before the birth of a child by choosing an appropriate spouse with whom they can work together to build a successful family. That is considered one of the most important rights of a child. Parents are expected to work as a team as God says in the Qur'an,

Men and women are protectors of one another: They enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil, they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity and obey God and his messenger, on them will God pour his mercy for God is exalted in power, wise. (Qur'an 9:71)

In addition, the process of mutual consultation is one of the most effective tools in establishing good parent-child communication skills. The Qur'an admires "...those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation..." (Qur'an 2:37-38).

On the other hand, the Qur'an outlines children's obligations toward their parents, *birr al walidayn* or *bihvalidayn ihsaan* (Qur'an 4: 36, 29: 8, and 31:14-15). God says,

Thy Lord has decreed that ye worship none but Him, and ye be kind to parents, whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life. Say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them. But address them in terms of honor. And out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: 'My Lord! Bestow on them Thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood.' (Qur'an 17:23-26)

The Qur'an explains in detail how to behave towards, and care for, parents,

We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents, in travail upon travail did his mother bear him and in years twain was his weaning: (hear the command), "Show gratitude to Me and to your parents, to Me is the final Goal. But if they strive to make you join in worship with Me things of which you have no knowledge, obey them not; yet bear them company in this life with Justice (and consideration), and follow the way of those who turn to Me, and I will tell you the Truth (and meaning of all that you did). (Qur'an 31:14-15)

In order to guide and help children to be good *khalifah's* on earth, it is necessary for parents to improve their knowledge and skills on different levels, but especially their parenting skills.³³ They should provide their best to ensure their children are

³³ The Qur'anic story of a righteous man instructing his son highlights the priorities of a Muslim parent to raise God-fearing children: "O my son! Join not in worship (others) with God: for

healthy at all levels; physically, psychologically, and spiritually. Parents must be good role models for their children by demonstrating fairness, righteousness, patience, honesty, trustworthiness, and other important qualities. All children, boys and girls, must be treated equally and fairly because justice brings peace and love. Parents should use wisdom and the proper manner of speaking in order to offer good advice. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) set the best example in this regard when God (swt) directed him to "*Invite to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious*" (Qur'an 16:125). Even in instances when there is a direct violation of God's commands, such as when the Muslims disobeyed God (swt) and the Prophet (pbuh) during the Battle of Uhud, one may not be harsh. As the Prophet was told,

It is part of the mercy of God that thou dost deal gently with them. Werd thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (God's) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment). (Qur'an 3:159)

These believers were not dismissed or discounted just because they were disobedient. The same can be applied at the level of family relationships.

The Islamic process of decision-making in all relationships is based on the principle of mutual consultation, *shura*, and children should be involved. Any decision that will impact the family should be arrived at through this process. The Qur'an says,

...those who avoid the greater crimes and shameful deeds, and, when they are angry even then forgive; those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation... (Qur'an 2:37-38)

The process of mutual consultation is also specifically mentioned in terms of decision-making regarding the care of children, especially in the case of divorce, to promote peace among all parties.³⁴

false worship is indeed the highest wrongdoing...If there be (but) the weight of mustard seed and it were (hidden) in a rock, or anywhere in the heavens or on the earth, God will bring it forth: For God understands the finer mysteries and is well-acquainted (with them). O my son! Establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong, and bear with patient constancy whatever betide thee; for this is firmness (of purpose) in the conduct of affairs. And swell not thy cheek with pride at men, nor walk in insolence through the earth; for God loves not any arrogant boaster. And be moderate in pace, and lower thy voice; for the harshest of sounds without doubt is the braying of the donkey" (31:12-19).

³⁴ Qur'an 2:233 - *"The mothers shall give suck to their offspring for two whole years, if the father desires to complete the term. But he shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms. No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear. No mother shall be treated unfairly on account of her child. Nor father on account of his child, an heir shall be chargeable in the same way. If they both decide on weaning by mutual consent, and after due consultation, there is no blame on them. If you decide on a foster-mother for*

Therefore, in Islam, the concept of righteous mates expands beyond the illusory limits of this perishable world into the eternal realm of everlasting bliss. The Qur'an says,

And those who pray, "Our Lord! Grant unto us [spouses] and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes, and give us (the grace) to lead the righteous." (Qur'an 25:74)

In describing the righteous and sealing this beautifully intricate concept of marriage, the Qur'an talks of those who pray to have spouses and offspring that will be the "comfort of one's eyes" or *qurrat ayn*. This term, *qurrat ayn*, cannot be adequately translated, for the depth of this poetically poignant supplication is best left in its original language. The completely holistic family is connected to leadership for the righteous,

Those are the ones who will be rewarded with the highest place in heaven... (Qur'an 25: 75)

CONCLUSION

The family has been used in this study as a model for the implementation of various Islamic values and principles as the means for achieving tranquility and peace, in seeding conciliation and minimizing violence. The union between spouses must be based on the Qur'anic concepts of *tawhid* (oneness of God) and *istikhlaf* (vicegerency). The family, as the basic constructive unit on which the rest of society is built, must be the environment in which the values of the larger society are developed and strengthened.

The Qur'an, in its comprehensive teachings, provides the most detail for issues concerning the family, and the *Sunnah* has provided explanations and examples for implementation. By examining these teachings, it is obvious that the goal is to build and preserve this crucial family unit. The reading of these teachings must be done in a holistic manner, not by partitioning them into individual components, because reading any verse out of context can lead to confusion and misunderstanding.

Islam prohibits any form of domestic violence, including emotional, verbal, or physical abuse. It is important to note that existing social attitudes are unconscious factors in the interpretation of social issues in the Qur'an, as has happened with the verse of 4:34 (discussed above). The Qur'an clearly explains the major characteristics of *Shari'ah* in Surah 7:157,

your offspring there is no blame on you provided you pay (the mother) what you offered, on equitable terms. But fear God and know that God sees well what you do."

He commands them what is just, and forbids them what is evil; He allows them as lawful what is good and pure, and prohibits them from what is bad and impure. He releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes.

That is because the *Shari'ah*'s general role is based on ease and mercy; it is meant to be easily adaptable to any society, so that when circumstances change, attitudes can be modified to fit existing situations. Various cultural patterns actively influence the interpretation of the text. The Qur'an will continue to be open to all humans' readings, as long as its value system and its general rules are preserved until the Day of Judgment.

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A REPORT ON THE REALITY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY
IN THE UNITED STATES

PART II: THE REALITY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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A PEACEFUL IDEAL, VIOLENT REALITIES: A STUDY ON MUSLIM FEMALE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

By Keilani Abdullah

Domestic violence is a major public health concern that not only costs our society in terms of lost wages, medical treatment, and domestic productivity, but more critically in terms of physical injury, mental illness, child neglect and abuse, suicide, and death (Evan and Flitcraft 1996). Domestic violence in this study will focus on the mental, emotional, and physical abuse at the hands of a past or present intimate partner. While such abuse can affect either partner in a relationship, women overwhelmingly represent the majority of abuse victims. It is the most prevalent cause of injuries for which women seek medical treatment and the cause of approximately a third of female homicides each year in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2003). Domestic violence impacts lives across religious, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. This work will juxtapose interpretations of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*¹ (recorded traditions modeled by the Prophet Muhammad) on the topic of the treatment of women and marital relations in Islam with data collected on Muslim female survivors of domestic violence at a U.S. shelter between 1999 and 2002 in order to examine the relationship between Islamic ideals and social realities.

Through the revelation of the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslim women gained the right to consent to marriage (Qur'an 4:19), seek a divorce (Qur'an 2:229), own and inherit property (Qur'an 4:7), testify and serve as witnesses (Qur'an 2:282), and pursue an education (Sahih Bukhari, Volume 3, Book 46, Number 723).² The Qur'an makes reference to women and men as mutual helpmates, companions, and protectors (Qur'an 30:21, Qur'an 2:187). It recognizes men and women as equally valuable in the sight of Allah (Qur'an 4:1, 2:226). While the Qur'an and examples of the Prophet Muhammad challenged misogyny, the social reforms that brought early Muslim women into honorable positions in the family, education, leadership, and commerce are being challenged

¹ The *Sunnah* is comprised of the sayings and traditions, also known as *Hadith*, of Prophet Muhammad that Muslims believe should be followed as part of an Islamic way of life.

² All *Hadith* references in this work are cited from the *USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Texts: Hadith Database* that includes the complete collections of Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Al Muwatta of Ibn Malik, and the partial collection of the Sunan Abu-Dawud.

by neotraditional³ ideals among Muslims that relegate women to rights based on male prerogative.

MALE AUTHORITY IN ISLAM

One study estimates that 10% of Muslim women in the United States experience abuse (Alkhateeb 1998). Due to the ostracism of women who report spousal abuse, the stigma of divorce, cultural values that emphasize family honor over individual rights, and a quietly sanctioned right to wife beating due to misinterpretations of the Qur'an, Muslim family advocates argue that this estimate of domestic violence is underrepresented. For example, one Muslim community estimates that for every case of reported abuse, almost fifty are unreported, and less than two percent of victims actually seek help (Faizi 2001). While the types of abuse in Muslim families are not different than in other communities, many justifications that Muslims use are based on Islam. According to Dena Saadat Hassouneh Phillips, Ph.D.,

American Muslim women are a marginalized group who are subject to the harsh effects of multiple layers of oppression including gender, ethnic, race, class, and spiritual oppressions... The insular [Muslim] community, the accepted practice of wife beating as a symbolic gesture, and the very high importance put upon marriage by the Islamic religion creates a difficult situation for many American Muslim women. (Hassouneh Phillips 2000, presentation at the 11th International Congress on Women's Health Issues, San Francisco)

The interpretation of the Qur'an, specifically surrounding the chapter *Surat al-Nisaa'* (The Women) is among the most cited sources on the topic of gender and marital relations,

Husbands are the protectors and maintainers of their (wives), because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) spank them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all.) (Qur'an 4:34)⁴

³ Neotraditionalism refers to contemporary movements that believe an "authentic" practice of Islam can be achieved by observing the most conservative elements of the religion that include strict male authoritarianism.

⁴ All quotes from the Qur'an referred to in this work are referenced from the 10th edition of Abdullah Yusuf Ali's *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, because of its widespread use as an English translation.

This verse, which will continue to be discussed later in this work, is often used as the source to affirm men's superiority over women, and the justification for husbands to hit their wives. However, the revelation of the above verse served to improve the status of women. Prior to Islam, men could marry as many women as they wished, divorce them without reason, and abandon them in a society where male support and protection were necessary for female survival. That was all experienced in a context where women had very few rights, and marginalized status (Yamani 1996). Therefore, while many Muslims and non-Muslims alike view this verse as justifying the abuse of wives, it actually limits male authority by curtailing acting on personal whim, and encourages conflict resolution. For example, in *Surat al-Nur*, verses 6-10, the concept of *li'an*, which allows the wife to swear that she is innocent of adultery without repercussions if the husband is the only accuser, is an example of the Islamic preference for forgiveness over punishment. More importantly, with the implementation of *li'an* a woman is not at the mercy of her husband's word, whether true or not, that would have otherwise overridden hers in a patriarchal society.

According to many interpretations, husbands have the right to physically discipline their wives based on the Qur'an's outline to reprimand *nushuẓ*, as described in *Surat al-Nisaa'*. Other interpretations of the meaning of *nushuẓ* are non-compliance by the wife to the husband's demands, while others such as Sayyid Qutb, a prominent thinker of the Islamic Resurgence (post-colonial movement in the Islamic world that revived the implementation of Islamic ideas into society), describes *nushuẓ* as disorder between the married couple (Wadud 1999). It can also be interpreted as morally obscene behavior, to include adultery. The charge of the latter is so serious that it requires four witnesses to actually see the act in order to establish the accusation (Qu'ran 24:4-5). Thus, the term is not necessarily a subjective disagreement between spouses. It is also important to understand that *nushuẓ* is gender neutral. In *Surat al-Nisaa'*, verse 128, *nushuẓ* (or *nushooẓan*) is used to refer to husbands as well,

If a wife fears cruelty or desertion (nushooẓan) on her husband's part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves; and such settlement is best; even though men's [humanity's] souls are swayed by greed. But if ye do good and practice self-restraint, Allah is well acquainted with all ye do.

When analyzing the Qu'ran, one must consider the variation in the meaning of words, the context of the revelation, and the comparison between verses. One must also keep in mind the progressive nature of Islam for positive societal change that was present from its inception. For those that believe husbands have the right to hit their wives according to verse 34 of *Surat al-Nisaa'*, the varied meaning of words must be considered. While the most common translations of *daraba* in verse 4:34 are "to hit" or "to strike," the word has multiple meanings. Based on different meanings, *daraba*, in the context of verse 4:34, could mean to turn a woman out of her marital home or to verbally chastise her. Other meanings of *daraba* include to travel

(3:156; 4:101), to strike or beat (8:12,50; 26:63; 37:93; 47:4,27), to set up (43:58; 57:13), to give examples (13:17, 14:24,45; 16:75,76,112; 18:32,45; 24:35; 30:28,58; 36:78; 39:27,29; 43:17; 59:21; 66:10,11), to take away, to ignore (43:5), to condemn (2:61), to seal, to draw over (18:11), or to cover (24:31) (Yuksel 1999).

The context of the revelation and comparison between verses must be employed. The challenge with tolerating the corporal punishment of wives as a standard for resolving conflict in marriage is that it contradicts the spirit of the Qur'an, and the example of Prophet Muhammad's relationship with his wives. Arbitration is the standard for marital conflict as evidenced by the following,

If ye fear a breach between the twain, appoint (two) arbiters, one from his family, and the other from hers; if they wish peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation for Allah hath full knowledge and is acquainted with all things. (Qur'an 4:35)

The Prophet enjoined kindness towards wives and disapproved of men hitting their wives, as evidenced by the *hadith* narrated by Ahmad, Abu Daud, and Ibn Majah that is related as follows,

Hakim ibn Muawiyah from his father reported, "I asked, 'Oh Messenger of Allah! What right has the wife of one among us got over him?' He said it is that you shall give her food when you have taken your food, that you shall clothe her when you clothe yourself, that you shall not slap her on the face, nor revile her, nor leave her alone accept within the house." (Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 11, Number 2139)

The Prophet Muhammad was never known to hit any woman or child, and he said that the best men were those that do not beat their wives (Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 11, Number 2141).

The idea that the Qur'an prescribes or even condones mistreatment based on gender or personal whim contradicts the numerous injunctions in the Qur'an to treat spouses with kindness,

And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts; verily in that are Signs for those who reflect. (Qur'an 30:21)

Even in cases where there is conflict between spouses, kindness is exhorted to the Muslims.

O ye who believe! Truly, among your spouses and your children are (some that are) enemies to yourselves: so beware of them! But if you pardon their faults and overlook, and cover up (their faults), Verily Allah is oft-forgiving, most merciful. (Qur'an 64:14)

ABUSE WITHIN THE AMERICAN MUSLIM FAMILY

This study analyzes the data of 57 closed-case files from a battered women's shelter that serves Muslim women. The cases include residents at the shelter between 1999 and 2002. Their personal identities have been concealed. One source

of data was from the intake form required for every adult seeking residence at the shelter. This information was compiled into statistics and the four categories that this study will focus on are race, socioeconomic status, marital status, and the types of abuse of each resident. Notes written by the director and other employees included in residents' files further explained the findings.

RACE

For demographic questions, data was collected on the ethnic identification of all of the residents. Those listed in the table are the only ethnic groups identified during the period of 1999-2002 (see Table 1).

Table 1 - Race		
Race	Frequency	Percent
African American	53	93.0
African	3	5.3
Hispanic	1	1.8
Total	57	100.0

The findings show the type of women that utilize this specific shelter. The statistics on residents at the shelter show that almost all of them were African American (93%). Research does not suggest that African American women have more marital problems or face domestic violence at higher rates. However, *masjid* (mosque) communities in the United States are segregated along the lines of ethnicity, and more commonly between international and indigenous⁵ Muslims (Haddad and Smith 1994). Culture, language, religious interpretations, and generational differences can be highlighted as the origin of the divide within American Muslim communities. This research focuses on the experiences of the residents of the shelter, who are indigenous Muslims and recent immigrants and the inferences here apply to these groups. The experiences of 2nd and 3rd generation children of immigrants are different from the group discussed here. However, additional information from the shelter director provided insight into how ethnicity comes into play. Ethnic division in the larger Muslim community also plays out in the organizations. Although the services are for all Muslims, since an African American Muslim representing the organization runs the shelter, many in the community may believe that it is for African Americans. The director even gave an example of a South Asian woman that resided at the shelter at one time, specifically because she knew her family

⁵ The term "indigenous" refers to Muslims in America who are converts or the descendants of recent converts.

would not look for her, as the shelter is in a majority African American neighborhood.

As evidenced by other battered women's programs throughout the United States, as well as in the city of the shelter, international women that do seek services often go to programs that cater to specific ethnic or language groups (Senturia, et al. 2000). In such programs, women are able to receive services usually by providers that are of their same background. Such providers can speak the same language, assist with immigration issues, and offer culturally competent care that empowers women and their children. For the same reason that the development of Muslim-run shelters is important to Muslim battered women who do not have their needs met with secular and Christian organizations, ethnic intervention programs serve the needs of international Muslim women.

Another reason for the marginal number of international women residing at the shelter can be impacted by culture. While arbitration in disputes is an Islamic principle, many Muslim cultures regard family honor as paramount, and avoid any act that may compromise this. Keeping problems within the family is a way to "save face" and maintain dignity. However, many women's concerns are negated within this context. The family may give solutions based on cultural Islam that may take women's rights for granted (Qurashi 2000). Knowledge of community resources can determine access to services. The shelter posts much of its information in *masjids* - both indigenous and international. The ability to advertise services is further determined by the permission of the individual *masjid*. Women's rates of *masjid* attendance in various communities and the permission to post information by the *masjid* based on their cultural and ideological persuasion will impact the community's opportunity to learn of community resources and services. Strong cultural beliefs that push women out of public spaces keep many women, regardless of background, out of the *masjid*, despite the fact that the *Sunnah* contains examples of women praying in *masjids* (L. Ahmed 1992; Sahih Bukhari, Volume 2, Book 13, Number 23; Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 10, Number 552; Sahih Bukhari Volume 2, Book 15, Number 94).

Indigenous Muslim women have a tacit cultural knowledge and often personal resources that enable their independence in the society. At the same time, these Muslim women have limitations to family arbitration due to lack of Muslim family members and alienation from their biological families due to conversion which may also necessitate outside help. In most Muslim majority cultures, domestic violence is considered a private matter and it is discouraged, even forbidden, to expose problems and seek assistance (Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Baker 1997). At the same time, indigenous Muslims utilize more counseling services (Bagby 2001). Supportive family resources often found among international Muslims and 2nd generation indigenous Muslims can be an advantage in overcoming marital problems and help discourage abrupt and unnecessary divorces.

Cultural and personal norms about dealing with family matters can be an obstacle to seeking help for marital conflict or abuse. Many victims are ashamed of

their circumstances, are in denial about being abused, or blame themselves for the abuse. While this phenomenon crosses cultural boundaries, these circumstances can be extenuated when strong traditional patriarchal family values come into play. Concerns such as keeping the family together, financial dependence on an abuser, fear of deportation, and threats of violence are of particular concern (Faizi 2001).

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Among the shelter residents, the most striking similarity was the very low income that residents reported (see Table 2). While the statistics on the shelter residents show that only 5.3% of women faced financial abuse (the husband has the financial means but refuses to support the wife), almost every resident reported an income at or below the poverty line. Income was difficult to ascertain due to the high omission on the questions of income and employment (see Table 3).

Table 2 – Monthly Income		
Income	Frequency	Percent
Not Available	26	45.6
\$0	18	31.6
\$1-600	7	12.3
\$601-1200	6	10.5
Total	57	100.0

Table 3 - Employment		
Employment	Frequency	Percent
Not Available	15	26.3
Housewife	1	1.75
Welfare	1	1.75
Child Support	2	3.5
SSI/SSD	2	3.5
Employed	5	8.8
Unemployed	2	3.5
Combination of Aid	1	1.3
Work/Aid	1	1.75
No Source	18	31.6
No Description	9	15.8
Total	57	100.0

Muslim husbands' financial support of their wives is obligatory in Islam and a necessary condition for marriage (Qur'an 4:34). However, if a husband has minimal income to start with, financial support by the husband still may not meet the family's basic needs. Financial deprivation is also reflected in the fact that when a woman leaves her husband, in many cases she leaves behind his financial support. If

women had other options, such as family support or a higher personal income, they may be less likely to come to a shelter. When women leave their husbands, they may estrange themselves from their Muslim community, which leaves them with little or no support (Hassounah-Phillips 2001b). While some of the reported income is what the husband gives in maintenance and not the total household income, according to the director of the shelter, the limited financial allowance still reflects depressed incomes. The reports from residents on the husbands' occupations were primarily within the service and manufacturing sectors, as well as those receiving unemployment. In fact, only one resident reported that her husband was a professional. Some studies do show a correlation between poverty and domestic violence, though that cannot be deduced in these findings (Bell 2003). At the same time, the missing information in this study is an issue in itself. According to the director of the shelter, it is not that the women who did not report do not have incomes, but that if they are not destitute they believe they may not receive help. In some cases, throughout a resident's stay, the actual financial status of some residents becomes revealed, and is different than their reported income.

Poverty, as a result of not working (at-home mothers, the unemployed) or underemployment, is an obstacle to achieving independence and leaving an abusive marriage. Being a member of an ethnic and religious minority heightens a woman's inability to gain employment. This can result from religious dress, racial discrimination, or even having a name that indicates ethnicity and religion. In families that believe in female domesticity, a strong ideal among Muslims, the result is limited personal income and thus limited independence. Though both international and indigenous Muslims face ethnic and religious discrimination, international Muslims tend to be more highly educated and to earn higher incomes than indigenous Muslims (Ba-Yunus 1997). While existing research does not differentiate between indigenous and international Muslim women's labor force participation, one study shows that 10% of Muslims are homemaker (Strum and Tarantolo 2003). Since we can infer based on cultural norms that practically all these persons are women, and with about half of American Muslims being women (Strum and Tarantolo 2003), we can estimate that approximately 20% of Muslim women are homemakers. African American Muslims, which represent the majority of shelter residents, make significantly less than the overall median American Muslim income (\$32,000 versus \$53,500 per year) (Ba-Yunus 1997, 26). While this limits the resources to leave an abusive relationship, African American Muslims have more cultural knowledge that would enable them to identify social services. Also, African American Muslims are more accepting of counseling services and possibly more likely to seek public recourse to domestic violence (CAIR 2001, 44). Despite the higher incomes of international Muslims, the wife of an abuser would lose this financial support when leaving the relationship, at least initially, and for many women, permanently. Thus, women who depend on husbands for financial support or have limited household incomes would find themselves needing financial help from the Muslim community in order to leave an abusive relationship.

DEFINING MARRIAGE

The *nikah* is the Islamic marriage contract. It stipulates the terms of agreement for married life, including the *mahr* (the marital dowry given by the husband to the wife which contracts an Islamic marriage), and the consent of both partners (Qur'an 4:4, Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 86, Number 98-99). The contract makes women legal partners in a marriage. Another reform Islam brought to married life imposed a limitation on polygyny (marriage of one man to multiple women) to four wives, with a preference for monogamy, and women received a share in inheritance as wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters (Qur'an 4:3, 4:11-12, and 4:176). In pre-Islamic Arabia, there were no limitations to the number of women a man could marry, and women had few personal rights (Yamani 1996).

Polygyny is permitted in the Qur'an and has benefits for family life. While the benefits to husbands are usually the focus, in contemporary married life, a polygynous family may appeal to some women by allowing for the benefits of marriage (companionship and financial support) without all of the familial responsibilities (domestic duties and child bearing). So women who cannot bear children, or want few to no children, can reach an amicable agreement with a husband who already has children with another wife. Also, women who are invested in pursuing a career could benefit from having fewer familial responsibilities. However, the misuse of polygyny can be abusive to women and children. Having multiple wives is a tremendous responsibility that, under the guise of Islam, most men cannot accommodate. It requires the husband to have the financial means to support the wives and all the resulting offspring from the marriages. The husband should be able to equitably provide resources and attention for each wife and the children without causing want among the others (Qur'an 4:3; Sahih Muslim Book 43, Number 7156; Sunan Abu Dawud Book 11, Number 2137). In Islamic history, polygyny was used primarily to help care for widowed women and orphaned young women resulting from war, and to forge political alliances (Chaudhry 1991). The Qur'an describes the conditions for multiple wives,

If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one or (a captive) that your right hands possess. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice. (Qur'an 4:3)⁶

⁶ Muslims believe that Prophet Muhammad's life serves as an example for how Muslims should live. The Prophet had multiple wives, to include women who had never been married and widows. Since he did not only marry orphans, this verse can be seen by Muslims to extend the parameters of multiple marriage beyond just caring for orphans.

Ye are never able to be fair and just as between women, even if it is your ardent desire: But turn not away (from a woman) altogether, so as to leave her (as it were) hanging (in the air). If ye mend your way sand practice self-restraint, Allah is Oft-forgiving, most merciful. (Qur'an 4:129)

The practice of polygyny can become abusive when men take other wives without regard for the feelings of his first family, when the women and children are deprived of resources and affection due to additional wives and children, and when threats of taking an additional wife is used to psychologically abuse and punish. In the United States, where polygyny is illegal, additional wives are not entitled to legal rights, and have little recourse to legally pursue financial support, insurance coverage, inheritance and other similar issues. In such situations, women and children can be easily abandoned.

The Qur'an prescribes family arbitration in marital disputes,

If ye fear a breach between them twain, appoint (two) arbiters, one from his family and the other from hers. If they wish for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation. For Allah has full knowledge and is acquainted with all things. (Qur'an 4:35)

The implementation of Islamic law changed the process of divorce. Before Islam, men had the right to irrevocably divorce women, leaving them without rights or a say in the matter (Yamani 1996). Islamic law prescribes that once divorce has been declared, a couple must observe a three month waiting period called *'iddah*. Within this time there is still an opportunity for reconciliation (Qur'an 2:231). Otherwise, the couple must abstain from each other until the time period expires. This is to insure that the woman is not pregnant. If she is pregnant, the divorce is not finalized until she delivers, as it is the husband's obligation to provide the mother and child with maintenance, to include housing, food, clothing, and basic necessities (Qur'an 2:228, 65:4-7). Divorced women have the right to keep their dowry if the man initiates the divorce, and women have the right to request a divorce from the courts (Qur'an 2:229).

Most are familiar with images of Muslim women throughout the world having limited rights and little recourse in legal issues, particularly family law. While countries that do practice equity within *Shari'ah* (divine or Islamic law) are ignored by sensational media, many countries whose jurisprudence is based on *fiqh* (man-made law based upon an interpretation of *Shari'ah*) disadvantages women. This study asserts that it is not the fault of the law itself but misogynist interpretations of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Domestic violence and honor killings⁷ are widely ignored by the police and courts in many Muslim countries. Most women never make it to

⁷ The murder of a female by her male relative(s) on suspicion of indecent behavior, usually interacting with men, that jeopardizes family honor.

government authorities to voice their grievances. Due to patriarchal Qur'anic interpretations within communities, many women do not know their rights according to the Qur'an, or if they pursue them, there are no mechanisms in place, whether through family or the society, to grant these rights.

Despite the misnomer that Muslim women in the United States have more "freedom" than their sisters abroad because of U.S. law, many Muslim women in the United States prefer to obtain their rights through Islamic law. There are no Islamic legal protections for Muslim women within the American civil laws. Even if notions of women's rights are present in the law, they are secular and may be unrelated to or contradict Islam. For those desiring to remain within the scope of Islamic family law, the imam (person who leads prayer at a *masjid*, or mosque) or other community leaders are sought for advice and legal rulings. Interpretations of male authority in the Qur'an and patriarchal practices in most cultures can influence imams to render unjust rulings upon women. At the same time, imams can apply religious injunctions in ways that protect Muslim women by explaining and sanctioning religious rights in family life.

The findings regarding the participants suggest that almost as many Muslim women are in the "Civil" (civil marriages and *nikah*) category as are in the "*Nikah*"⁸ (*nikah* with no civil certificate) category (see Table 4).

Table 4 - Marital Status to Abuser		
Status	Frequency	Percent
Civil	22	38.6
Nikah	20	35.1
Divorced	8	14.0
Separated	4	7.0
Iddah	3	5.3
Total	57	100.0

With the acceptance of *nikah* only marriages, Muslim women are far more susceptible to the problems associated with a lack of legal protections. Abu Laith Luqman Ahmad, imam of Masjid Ibrahim in California, explains some problems of *nikah* only marriages,

Civil and Islamic marriages have taken on the connotations of real and make-believe. A person will say: "Islamically I'm married to so and so but legally I'm still

⁸ The Islamic marriage contract, known as a *nikah*, stipulates the terms of the marriage and the dowry (Qur'an 4:4). In the United States, it is not usually recognized as a legal document. Therefore, Muslim couples must also obtain a civil marriage license to be legally recognized as married by the state.

married to so and so." Or they will say, "We are married in Islam but we are not legally married"...In virtually every case, a civil marriage solemnized Islamically carries the full applicable weight of legality and sanctity. Whereas an Islamic marriage by itself in many cases only carries limited weight not extending too far beyond the boundaries of the masjid. (A.L. Ahmad 2001)

In most cases, these women have limited or no financial support from their husbands which has led them to seek residence in a shelter, especially in cases where they have been abandoned by their husbands. When controlling for income, there was not a statistically significant change in effect of income on marital status. In comparing civil marriages with *nikah* versus *nikah* only marriages, there was a 45% versus 35% omission rate, 23% versus 35% with no reported incomes, 18% versus 15% with less than \$600 a month, and 14% versus 15% with between \$601 and \$1,200 a month. However, all the cases of financial abuse were with women with both *nikah* and civil marriages. This does not discredit the idea that there is uncertainty of securing financial support in *nikah* only marriages, but perhaps there is a greater seriousness attached to marriages with civil certificates so these women expect Qur'anically-required financial maintenance whereas women with *nikah* only marriages feel there is no legal remedy for financial maintenance (alimony) nor one from the U.S. *ummah* that could be enforced since there is no widespread system of records keeping on marriage and divorce, thus resulting in a lower expectation for maintenance. This is not possible to confirm in this research since there is such a high omission on the question of income and no statistically significant difference in the reported income for women with *nikah* only marriages and those with both civil and *nikah* marriages. For some of the residents, this could be addressed through legal recourse which is limited by a *nikah* only marriage. Women are left in a position where they are not able to get spousal support in civil proceedings nor does the Muslim community possess a mechanism to extract support from husbands. The imam says further,

Unfortunately, Muslims in the United States do not possess the power, influence, or organizational congruence, to establish a nationwide or even local system of marriage and divorce. This is why a person is able to go from city to city and marry as many times as they like in the Muslim community without anyone even knowing their real name! Or have multiple wives without the others even knowing about it! It is also why men and women are more likely to abandon marriage by simply walking away because the Islamic marriage in their eyes carries no real validity. It may at its inception but when things get rough as they often do, they know they can just simply walk away with no legal ramifications. (A.L. Ahmad 2001)

Leadership cannot discourage or ignore civil marriages yet offers no system of sanctions for violations of the *nikah*. Civil marriage is used to offer some marital protections with regard to financial maintenance, inheritance, health insurance, taxes, and immigration status. It does not usurp the validity of the *nikah*, yet offers protections in the absence of established Islamic law. At the same time, civil law

alone cannot address the full range of rights and responsibilities outlined in Islamic family law. Alternatives, in addition to civil marriage, must be sought for securing marital legal protections.

Particularly in the United States, due to conversion to Islam and immigration, often family members and elders are not available to arbitrate in marital problems (Haddad and Lummis 1987). This requires that leadership is available to facilitate arbitration. One challenge with arbitration, however, is that the procedure and its rulings are limited to the interpretations of Islam by the local community. This can be determined by culture and Islamic schools of thought, which influence religious interpretations and affect women's chances of receiving satisfactory rulings. Often the arbitrators have close connections to the men involved in family disputes and this makes objectivity questionable. Further, women who go to their imams for help are often told to be patient and pray for the actions of the husband, including physical abuse, to end. Many women are blamed for their abuse as a result of not pleasing their husbands or told to place the importance of the family's privacy and cohesion above their personal concerns (Faizi 2001).

In order to exit an abusive situation, women may seek a divorce,

A divorce is permissible only twice: after that, the husbands should retain their wives together on equitable terms, or let them go with kindness. It is not lawful for you (men) to take back any of your gifts (from your wives), except when both parties fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by Allah. If ye (judges) do indeed fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by Allah, there is no blame on either of them if she gives something for her freedom. These are the limits ordained by Allah; so do not transgress them. If any do transgress the limits ordained by Allah, such persons wrong (themselves as well as others). (Qur'an 2:229)

Islam allows for divorce, though it is strongly discouraged as evidenced by the *hadith*: "Allah did not make anything lawful more abominable to Him than divorce" (Abu Dawud Book 12, Number 2172). Divorce is very harmful to the fabric of community life by breaking up families, distancing children from one or both parents, causing undue financial burden particularly on women, and giving emotionally immature individuals an easy way out of marriage instead of working hard to overcome obstacles. The fear of displeasing Allah can cause women to stay in mentally or physically dangerous situations or cause psychological distress if women follow through with getting divorced. Divorcing an abuser also brings the prospect of disapproval and isolation. It is difficult for women to find support from their family and community. They find themselves outside of Muslim community life since they are no longer under their father or husband, who is important to the status of women in the Muslim social structure. It also makes them less marriageable due to the cultural stigma of divorce. Women may also have to distance themselves from their family and community to stop the abuse (Hassounah-Phillips 2001a).

TYPES OF ABUSE

The closed-case files of shelter residents were examined to understand many of the issues surrounding domestic violence in the *ummah* (worldwide community of Muslims). The majority were victims of multiple abuses by their husbands. The types of abuse women reported included emotional and verbal abuse, physical abuse, financial abuse (i.e., husband withholds resources as a form of control), sexual abuse, drug abuse, weapons used against wives, and situations where combinations of abuse existed (see Table 5).

Table 5 - Types of Abuse		
Abuse	Frequency	Percent
Physical	13	22.8
Emotion/Verbal	7	12.3
Financial	3	5.3
Sexual	6	10.5
Drugs	3	5.3
Weapons	4	7.0
Multiple Abuse	21	36.8
Total	57	100.0

No one can say that the described violence by the shelter residents is permissible according to the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Women were abused through physical violence, meant to inflict physical harm, to include weapons, which is not permitted in Islam. Drug abuse, which is prohibited, played a role in abuse. Withholding financial support (providing basic maintenance of food, clothing, shelter, and necessities when the husband is capable) was also reported, though it is not permitted in Islam since men are to financially support their wives. We must also consider that nearly 40% of women described two or more forms of abuse in their marriages.

Husbands' drug abuse of both narcotics and alcohol is cited as the type of abuse endured by 5.3% of women at the shelter. As in most marginalized communities, problems, such as drug abuse, are often ignored for fear of bringing shame to a group that is already socially stigmatized. Also, because drug abuse is strictly prohibited in Islam, the embarrassment of admitting addiction keeps many Muslim families from seeking help. This keeps individuals in a cycle of drug abuse and domestic violence, which are related (Bailey and Kellerman 1996).

Certain factors in the analysis made a statistically significant difference in outcomes. Marital status was related to the types of abuse women experienced. Women with *nikah* only marriages, versus women with both civil and *nikah* marriages, faced higher rates (68% versus 32%) of multiple forms of abuse. It is difficult to ascertain the reason for such a significant difference in the rates.

Isolation is usually part of abuse. Since the family is a private arena, isolation from outside influences increases opportunities for violence. Often women in

abusive relationships are forbidden from visiting family and friends, or prohibited from employment and outside activities (Dobash and Dobash 1979). These actions minimize the possibility of women gaining support and resources that will influence and enable them to leave a relationship. In the case of Muslim women, these circumstances are exacerbated by either being a convert or an immigrant which results in minimal family presence and support. Also, the control of financial resources is the advantage that abusers use to maintain their power. Usually, women are financially dependent on abusers, particularly when women do not work in the paid labor market or make minimal earnings. Even if they have income or wealth due to earnings and ownership, abusive husbands may take it over.

Some aspects of spousal abuse are magnified within the Muslim community. Harassment, while not specific to Muslim relationships, can be more pronounced due to community dynamics. Threats to abduct children can be very strong in the face of an immigrant husband who, if he returns to his country of origin with the children, is unlikely to be prosecuted by authorities for their return. The practice of Islamic family law abroad generally favors the father in child custody (Esposito 1982). Harassment can also be perpetrated in the form of the husband spreading rumors of immorality, thus threatening a woman's credibility and ability to garner family and community support, or to remarry (Hassounah-Phillips 2001a).

A significant reason that is used to justify husbands hitting their wives is the permission for physical discipline outlined in the Qur'an. This is supported by interpretations of Islamic liturgy that command a wife's obedience to her husband. The word "obedience", translated from *qanitatun*, is often translated to mean wifely obedience to the husband in *Surat al-Nisaa'* (Qur'an 4:34; Wadud 1999). However, this word is also used throughout the Qur'an to refer to human behavior towards Allah (Qur'an 2:216, 2:238, and 16:120). Furthermore, unwavering obedience is only for Allah, and it is considered *shirk* (polytheism) to associate anything with Allah (Qur'an 31:13). The Qur'an states that there is no compulsion in religion (Qur'an 2:256). Thus, if matters of religion cannot even be forced, how can a husband justify beating up his wife based on subjective matters? While *nushuz* is used by some scholars to denote any non-compliance on the part of the wife, the connotation of this term can be described as morally inappropriate behaviors, not simply the individual disagreement of the husband. The *Sunnah* illustrates differences of opinion between Umar ibn Al-Khattab, one of the closest companions of the Prophet Muhammad and an eventual leader of the Muslim *ummah*, and his wife,

Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated from Ibn 'Abbas and from Umar that the latter said: "In the Pre-Islamic Time of Ignorance we held women as nothing until Allah revealed what He revealed concerning them and assigned for them what He assigned. Once, as I was thinking over a certain matter, my wife said, "I recommend that you do such-and-such." I said to her, "What have you got to do with the matter? Why do you poke your nose in a matter which I want to see fulfilled?" She replied, "How strange you are, O son of Al-Khattab! You want no argument while

your daughter, Hafsa, surely argues with the Messenger of Allah. (Sahih Bukhari, Volume 7, Book 72, Number 734)

Tolerance for any degree of violence opens a floodgate to the perpetuation of all types of violence. It is problematic to place husbands in the role of disciplinarian since marriage has tremendous religious and cultural significance for Muslim women (Hassounah-Phillips 2001b). This pressures women to stay in dangerous relationships due to their internalization of these values. Therefore, Muslim leaders must denounce all spousal corporal punishment. In fact, many Muslim leaders do denounce domestic violence. If this is the case, though, what explains its pervasiveness? Challenging domestic violence without addressing misogyny is futile. It is more convenient to attribute men's actions to individual pathological behaviors instead of to cultural ideology and structural factors. While individual behavior must be held accountable, ignoring the pervasive belief of female inferiority rampant in Muslim communities will not allow the root cause of domestic violence to be challenged or the practice to be eliminated.

SOLUTIONS

WOMEN'S POSITION IN THE *UMMAH*

The Qur'an and the *Sunnah* are replete with examples of the cherished place of women in the Muslim *ummah* (worldwide Muslim community). In *khutbahs* (the sermon given before the Friday congregational prayer), at Islamic conferences, during counseling, and in private conversations, collective individuals and importantly leadership must challenge the idea of female inferiority. Due to the value of the imam's (prayer, and often *masjid*, leader) word, as well as other respected community leaders, hearing from male leadership that women must be respected will carry more weight than from the wife or other women whose perspective and authority are often dismissed. The idea that stopping domestic violence is a "feminist" issue or a personal opinion must be replaced with the idea that it is part of being a Muslim, and is the way of the Prophet Muhammad. Educational campaigns, workshops, and conferences must work to end *masjid* community culture that tolerates the disrespect of women. Islamic education must be improved to include the roles of women in Islamic history as a component. We must know the whole history of the early *ummah* to be able to use it as an example today.

We must challenge *masjids* that do not have areas for women to pray, or substandard accommodations, as well as increase resources and roles for women in *masjid* organizational positions. The *ummah* must recognize and respect female leaders, and imams must cooperate with women in leadership, such as women who are designated over *masjid* auxiliaries, Islamic education, social work and service committees. At the same time, women must be actively involved in all appropriate areas of *masjid* services. Allowing women only on committees serving women, children, and domestic aspects (food, *masjid* clean up, etc.) reifies the notion that

family problems are a women's issue. Addressing issues of gender outside of the women's *halaqa* (discussion group) to include *khutbahs* (sermons), *ta'leems* (lecture on a topic) and other similar settings is vital to educating our communities.

NO TOLERANCE FOR ABUSE

In the same approach to educating our *ummah* regarding the honor of women, we must also denounce domestic violence. It must be identified, explained, addressed using religious texts, and publicly condemned. *Shura* councils (the governing body in a *masjid* or Muslim community that makes decisions about local issues) must develop sanctions against abusers, such as asking them to leave the community until they stop the abuse, not doing business with them, not recommending them for marriage, and strongly encouraging them to get help such as counseling. Leadership must be trained about how to identify and handle domestic violence, and should get trained in counseling survivors as well as perpetrators of abuse, or identify Muslims with this training to be involved in arbitration. The lack of training by members of the *ummah* leads well-meaning individuals to endanger women and children through their advice and actions. Encouraging women to remain in dangerously abusive relationships to "save the family," telling sisters that they should try to please their husbands more, conducting counseling with both partners present which causes intimidation for the victim, refusing counseling with the belief that it is backbiting, or sending women away with no help or information to find help can be demoralizing, and can lead women to stay and get harmed or killed. Most importantly, we cannot protect criminals! When a Muslim harms anyone, that person has gone outside of the law of Islam and the law of the land. We cannot be afraid to turn individuals in to authorities when they have violated another person. While Islam teaches us to pardon the mistakes and shortcomings of other Muslims, it does not permit a Muslim to oppress anyone. Islam is staunchly against the abuse of spouses, and it teaches Muslims to help the oppressed and the oppressor – the help of the latter is by not letting him or her harm others.

FINANCIAL HELP & SHELTERS

Victims of abuse usually face financial challenges. It is vital that *masjids* create and support shelters for women and their children. Charity must be committed on a monthly basis by every *masjid* in a locale for this purpose. *Zakat* (charity to be given to the poor made obligatory by the Qur'an on every Muslim that can afford it) should be given as a priority to the residents of those facilities as well as women reestablishing their life after an abusive relationship. *Zakat* must be used for its intended purpose – the care of those in need (Qur'an 2:177). Increasing awareness about domestic violence will be necessary to garner financial support. Despite the feeling of community ownership due to financial support, shelter locations must never be revealed due to security concerns. Women cannot be safe if abusers can gain access to these safe havens. Violence escalates when women leave a relation-

ship, and most murders of the abused occur when they attempt to leave, so shelter confidentiality is paramount (Evan and Flitcraft 1996).

DEVELOPING SERVICES

Support groups for survivors of domestic violence must be openly endorsed and financially supported. Batterers groups should be organized and facilitated from an Islamic perspective that helps abusers understand their roles and provides the tools to change their behavior. Job training, employment networking, substance abuse treatment, and emergency financial assistance can increase the stability of families and the community.

Faith and religious scholarship alone does not qualify individuals to address all of the needs in the *ummah*. Service professionals, most of whom could be found in the *ummah*, should be trained and employed, for pay, to run services and shelters so that needs are appropriately met. While volunteers are the lifeblood of community programs, depending solely on volunteers to run *masjid* institutions can compromise quality since many competent, dedicated people must limit or end their work due to the necessity of paid employment. In addition, there are various programs used outside of the Muslim community that, with just a small amount of reworking, can effectively address our social problems. Applying for grants and federal funding may become necessary if a community cannot support the domestic violence intervention programs. Instead of viewing such options as intruding on an Islamic way of life, they should be seen as an effective tool for serving needs.

Muslim leaders cannot and should not have to do it all. When other *ummah* members are trained to serve in social service roles, the expertise that these individuals have can be tapped into, and focused on a specific area. Also, leadership and the *ummah* must end the "turf" mentality concerning programs, organizations, and services for Muslim communities. Individuals who are leaders of independent groups or other *masjids* should not be treated as "outsiders" or invaders by local leadership. There must be a concerted effort to work in unity. A systems approach that addresses women's rights in Islamic jurisprudence, individuals' holistic health, and economic stability, is necessary to foster healthy and safe Muslim families and bring an end to domestic violence.

PRACTICING ISLAMIC FAMILY LAW & BUILDING INSTITUTIONS

Many Muslims in the United States see Islamic law as the solution to their problems. The nuances of Islamic law that are important to the outcomes of adjudication currently cannot be achieved in most civil courts. While the issues facing Muslim families are not very different from those in the mainstream society, the justifications and solutions emanate from Islam. In the absence of *Shari'ah* courts that deal with family affairs such as divorce or child custody, imams are often consulted for advice or even a decision. Despite the capability of the imam to

respond, other responsibilities overwhelm most *masjid* leaders. Alternative methods are being sought by some Muslim communities across America. Irshad Abdal-Haqq and Qadir Abdal-Haqq discuss community-based arbitration through alternative dispute resolution (ADR) as a method for implementing justice. Mediation and arbitration are outlined as processes to secure a formalized decision on a disputed matter. Developing an arbitration panel with members trained in *fiqh* can dedicate the time and expertise to address family issues where dispute resolution can bring an amicable agreement to a family.⁹

A system of standards across American *masjids* can help family life. Since the *ummah* is not a monolith, calibrating standards based on ideological, cultural, and social context will help these tools be relevant. Standards should be developed by *shura* (consensus) that represent various perspectives. These should include requiring premarital counseling with couples and discouraging premature marriages, training for premarital counselors, and *wali* (the required male advocate who represents the interest of a woman seeking marriage, usually a relative or upstanding community member) workshops so that men understand their role and become known to the community to be representing its women. Additional efforts for promoting healthy Muslim families should include parenting seminars for women and men, encouraging foster parenting and adoption of Muslim children, developing task forces that work with mainstream institutions to advise their services to Muslim populations, and developing a records system for Islamic marriages and divorces.

IN CONCLUSION

Muslims in the United States may benefit from the example of other religious communities in taking a faith-based approach to addressing societal needs. The Muslim community, while not limited in resources, is limited in services to the community. Social services delivery and support for existing service organizations are sorely lacking. Programs that address domestic violence prevention and intervention, job training and employment, substance abuse treatment, and emergency financial assistance are critical. Support groups for survivors of domestic violence and batterers must be openly endorsed and financially supported. The first step, however, is to address the misconceptions surrounding the role of women. The *ummah* must overcome ethnic separation to pool resources to meet these needs. The religious faith, economic strength, cultural knowledge and social resources of Muslims can produce the means to meet these needs.

⁹ In cases of domestic violence where a woman is not safe in her home, dispute resolution is not appropriate because it can heighten hostilities and create a dangerous situation for the woman. See Hicks' *Responsible Mediation and the Realities of Domestic Violence*.

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THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON

The first settlement in Boston was made in 1630 by a group of Puritan settlers from England. They came to the city in search of religious freedom and a place to practice their faith. The city was founded on a small island in the harbor, and the settlers built a fort to protect themselves from the Native Americans.

The city grew rapidly in the years following its founding. By 1640, the population had increased to over 1,000 people. The settlers built a city hall and a church, and they established a system of government. The city was known for its strict laws and its commitment to religious freedom.

The city continued to grow and develop over the years. In 1693, the city was granted a charter by the British government, which gave it the right to elect its own officials. The city was known for its strong sense of community and its commitment to the principles of democracy.

The city was also known for its role in the American Revolution. In 1770, the British government ordered the soldiers to fire on a group of people in the city, an event known as the Boston Massacre. This event led to the city's decision to declare its independence from the British government.

The city continued to grow and develop over the years. In 1830, the city was granted a charter by the state government, which gave it the right to elect its own officials. The city was known for its strong sense of community and its commitment to the principles of democracy.

The city was also known for its role in the American Civil War. In 1864, the city was the site of the Battle of Boston, a major battle between the Union and the Confederacy. The city was known for its strong sense of community and its commitment to the principles of democracy.

The city continued to grow and develop over the years. In 1930, the city was granted a charter by the state government, which gave it the right to elect its own officials. The city was known for its strong sense of community and its commitment to the principles of democracy.

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG MUSLIMS SEEKING MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING¹

By Salma Elkadi Abugideiri

CASE STUDY

It was the moment of truth: meeting my first client during my counseling internship. She had requested home-based services because she had limited transportation and no childcare. She had called the agency reporting symptoms of depression. I was excited and nervous about putting what I had learned in the classroom to the test. I was also excited because she was Muslim, and one of my goals in pursuing counseling as a profession was to serve Muslims.

Nothing I learned during my graduate program prepared me for the story I was about to hear. Sophia² had been beaten severely during her pregnancy and had given birth to a child with severe neurological delays as a result of repeated assaults. I saw a beautiful, dark-haired baby with striking eyes who was just a few months younger than my own, but this child would never learn to walk, feed himself, talk clearly, go to regular schools, or enjoy life in the way most children do. His mother would never have the opportunity to witness him growing into a healthy, functioning member of society; she would never even get to see him run and play with other children.

*On top of this incredible challenge, her husband abandoned her when he discovered his son's deficits and accused her of having someone else's son. Her parents insisted she put him in an institution because of the shame and burden he would bring to the family. She was determined to raise him and care for him, and she struggled with the healthcare and social services systems to accomplish this goal despite having no support and limited resources. This story was more than I could bear, overwhelming me to the point of tears and speechlessness. I barely managed to ask Sophia how she was able to cope. She pulled a *Qur'an* off the shelf and read some verses that had given her strength and courage and reminded her of God's presence with her.*

I left Sophia's house incredibly humbled by her strength, courage and faith. I had no way of knowing then that Sophia's case was simply the first of many similar stories that I would hear over the course of my work as a therapist.

¹ Much appreciation goes to Maha Alkhateeb for assisting with entering and analyzing the data, once they were extracted from the files and coded by the therapist to maintain confidentiality. This paper could not have been written without her assistance. Thanks is also due to Altaf Hussain, Fatima Mirza, Deborah Ross, and Shoshana Ringel for their invaluable feedback and suggestions.

² The name has been changed to preserve her identity.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a harsh reality for all ethnic and religious groups, indiscriminately affecting families of all educational and socio-economic backgrounds. For the past twelve years, I have worked as a mental health counselor serving a total of approximately 500 Muslim clients in both agency and private practice settings. From the time I encountered my first client as an intern, I became exposed to the damaging consequences of domestic violence, as well as the denial, shame and secrecy surrounding it in the Muslim community. Initially, like many other Muslims, I had little awareness of the prevalence of domestic violence among Muslims. Furthermore, I was not prepared for the degree of resistance I would face from other Muslim community members who became aware of the abuse when I sought help for my clients in the form of support, advocacy, and even bearing witness.

During my internship, and for the next eight years, working in a private, non-profit multicultural mental health agency, I continued to have a caseload that was at least ninety percent Muslim. These clients presented with a broad range of mental health needs, including mood disorders, substance abuse, family conflict, trauma, and cultural adjustment issues. The agency position required serving in multiple roles in addition to being a therapist, including case manager, interpreter for Arabic-speaking clients, advocate and cultural sensitivity trainer. Through this work, I learned about the many facets of domestic violence among Muslims, and developed an understanding of some of the unique needs of Muslim families affected by domestic violence. For the past six years I have worked in a private practice setting, where I have continued to serve mostly Muslim clients from various ethnic backgrounds, and with a wide range of mental health issues. It is the hands-on experience of working with Muslims who have experienced domestic violence that has shaped my understanding of domestic violence among Muslims, and has informed my work and my writing. The focus of this paper is the result of my work in private practice, illustrating how domestic violence is a common theme among a majority of the clients served in that practice, regardless of the problem initially presented by the client.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is little research available that specifically studies domestic violence among Muslims living in the United States. Most published work has been divided by ethnic groups that represent predominantly Muslim cultures, such as Arab Americans (Jaber 2005; Kulwicki and Miller 1999), South Asian women (Abraham 1999; Ahmed, Riaz, Barata and Stewart 2004; Dasgupta 2000; Preisser 1999; Raj and Silverman 2002), and women from Bangladesh (Rianon and Shelton 2003); or have been a comparison of multiple ethnic groups that include a significant subset of Muslims (Maker, Shah and Agha 2005). The focus of the majority of these studies has not been on the religious identity of the participants, but rather their ethnic

backgrounds, although some of the studies have broken down the participants according to their religious backgrounds. Since Muslims come from all over the world, their values and beliefs are shaped by their respective cultures. However, Muslims are united by common religious values and beliefs, and may stand apart in many ways from their non-Muslim counterparts. Issues related to religious beliefs and faith often play a central role in the client's worldview, including their perception and description of a problem and their comfort level with particular treatment interventions.

Few researchers have considered the unique concerns related to Muslim Americans in the field of domestic violence (Alkhateeb 1999; Ayyub, R. 2000; Faizi, N. 2001; Hassouneh-Philips 2001). These studies emphasize the relevance of Muslims' understandings of religious teachings and practices within their cultural contexts with regards to the issue of domestic violence. The strong religious and cultural values surrounding the importance of marriage at the individual, family and societal levels play a significant role in the degree to which Muslim women recognize abuse, and tolerate abusive marital relationships. Hassouneh-Phillips (2001) considers the value of obedience to God, and many Muslim women's submission to their husbands and communities as part of their submissive posture to God, as contributing factors to a negation of the self, and an acceptance of abuse towards themselves and other women. In her study of South Asian Muslims in the United States, Ayyub (2000) notes that the societal values around marriage, and the shame associated with a failed marriage, lead parents to encourage their daughters to stay in abusive relationships, without realizing that such pressure is, in itself, a form of abuse. She brings attention to the Islamic values of patience and tolerance as contributing factors to South Asian Muslims enduring abusive marriages. While these values are positive and are to be embraced as part of the Muslim personality, it is important to recognize that the emphasis on these values at the expense of other Islamic values such as justice, freedom of choice and gender equity may actually become harmful.

As far as the incidence of abuse among Muslims living in the United States, the first documented survey was conducted in 1993 by the North American Council for Muslim Women (NACMW), under the leadership of Sharifa Alkhateeb (1999). In this national survey of 63 Muslim community members and leaders asking about "everything from hitting to incest," ten percent of the participants reported having experienced domestic violence (Alkhateeb 1999, 49). She predicted that if verbal and psychological abuse had been included in the survey, the numbers would have been much higher. Others also suspect that domestic violence is greatly under-reported by Muslims. For example, Faizi (2001) reports that a Muslim psychiatrist who works closely with his community in Texas suspected that for every reported case of abuse, there are fifty unreported cases.

THE QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

My experience working within the Muslim community in various capacities³ suggests that the primary identity for practicing Muslims who are raised in the U.S. is not their ethnic background, as much as it is their religious affiliation. Furthermore, the increase in cross-cultural marriages reinforces sharing the common religious identity, and will make identifying Muslim Americans according to ethnic groups less relevant, and perhaps, less viable, especially as the Muslim American community continues to grow. The tendency of more recent generations of Muslims to prioritize their religious identity over their ethnic identity contrasts with earlier immigrant Muslims, who may have been more nationalistic and strived to maintain their customs and traditions. In my experience as a psychotherapist, clients who have indicated a preference for a Muslim counselor⁴ also indicate that the identity of the counselor as Muslim supersedes the importance of a similar ethnic background.

Religious context is particularly important when it comes to the issue of domestic violence, not only for Muslims but for all people of faith (Fortune 2001). Families affected by this issue are faced with difficult decisions that inherently raise questions related to their religious beliefs. In a secular society such as the United States, the central role that religion plays in many people's lives is often overlooked by service providers. While contemporary mental health practice emphasizes the importance of cultural values and ethnicity in counseling, many therapists still feel uncomfortable addressing matters of faith (Hugen 2001). This discomfort has become evident to me as I have been asked to give many cultural sensitivity trainings; frequently, I am asked to avoid speaking too much about religion and to just focus on culture. This request reflects a lack of understanding of the significant role that religion plays in the daily life, worldview, philosophy, and decision-making of a person for whom religion provides the meaning to, and the guide for, life.

When a woman is abused by her husband (or vice versa), she faces several dilemmas that are connected to her belief system and her relationship to God. Her

³I have served as an executive committee member, social service committee member and *zakat* (tithing or alms) committee member in mosques; Muslim pre-school and Sunday school teacher; and Muslim girls' youth group leader.

⁴Not all Muslims seeking therapy will seek out a Muslim therapist. It may be that a non-Muslim would be preferred to provide more anonymity in a relatively small Muslim community where many people know each other in multiple contexts. It may also be that Muslims experiencing problems that reflect non-adherence to Islamic teachings, like sexual identity issues or substance abuse issues, would feel more comfortable with therapists who do not practice Islam. Immigrant Muslims with limited English tend to prefer therapists who share a common language and ethnic background.

marriage is now in direct opposition to the description of marriage in the Qur'an as being a relationship grounded in mercy and compassion. She must face the difficult question of what to do. The stories of the women I have worked with over the years illustrate the difficult choices and questions that they must face. Focusing on the values of patience and perseverance, a woman might choose to be silent and endure the suffering, praying that God will end it soon. If she focuses on the value of preserving marriage and avoiding divorce, she may wonder if seeking safety by leaving her home will jeopardize her future in the hereafter, leading her to expect that her suffering in this life will be followed by suffering in hellfire. She may wonder, in fact, if God is punishing her through her abuser for some misdeed she had committed in the past. Valuing family honor and integrity, she may be reluctant to tell anyone of the horrors she is enduring. Many survivors experience a crisis of faith as they privately try to figure out how to resolve the terrible situation they are dealing with, often feeling completely alone, and even abandoned by God. Questioning why God does not make the abuse stop or the abuser change is not uncommon.

The current study was conducted in order to determine the prevalence of domestic violence among Muslims seeking mental health counseling from a Muslim therapist. It is an initial effort to begin filling the void in the literature regarding domestic violence in the American Muslim community. It seeks to identify any patterns that may shed light on this complex social problem in a population that to date has been under-studied and under-served. This study considers the degree of awareness that Muslim clients have about the issue of domestic violence, the relationship between gender and the experiencing of domestic violence, and the impact of domestic violence on psychological well-being.

METHOD

SAMPLE

The current study included a caseload that was predominantly made up of Muslims in the Northern Virginia and Washington D.C. metropolitan area. The majority of the Muslim clients in this study were looking specifically for a Muslim therapist, an experience that is echoed in the introduction to the first issue of the *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* (Basit & Hamid 2006). Frequently, clients stated that they preferred a Muslim therapist because of the increased likelihood of similar values, a decreased need to explain Islamic teachings or rituals that non-Muslim therapists may be unfamiliar with or may misunderstand, and a decreased likelihood of being judged or pressured to change Islamic values or behaviors by a non-Muslim therapist. Some clients specifically requested that Islamic teachings be included in the counseling sessions.

Most of the clients were highly educated with professional backgrounds. They included first or second generation immigrants as well as American converts to

Islam. Culturally, the clients originated from many different countries, with varying degrees of identification to their ethnic background as reflected in the diversity of cultural practices. They also included the full spectrum of religiosity, degree of conservatism, and degree of traditionalism in terms of ideology and practice. Most of the clients were mosque-going, and were at least loosely affiliated with a local mosque. Most clients were fluent in English and were moderately to highly acculturated into American society, while maintaining their religious practices and values to varying degrees. Clients varied greatly in the number of sessions attended and the duration of time that they were engaged in counseling. The range of time for duration of services was anywhere from one session, to three years. Many clients came to counseling intermittently, attending several sessions then dropping out for a few months or even a year, then returning for more sessions.

The clients came from a variety of referral sources, including local mosques, insurance panels, and word of mouth. Clients were seen individually, in couples, or as families. Multiple family members may have been seen individually, in which case they were counted separately. In the cases where the family was seen as "the client," then one person was named the "identified client" for record-keeping and reporting purposes.

Clients came to therapy with a wide range of presenting problems, including depression, anxiety, marital conflict, parent-child conflict, cultural adjustment issues, substance abuse, and identity issues. During the initial interview, clients were routinely asked if conflict in the family ever escalated to physical violence, yelling, or screaming. Examples of physical violence were usually offered (pushing, hitting, and throwing things). The question regarding abuse was among other routine questions about substance use, family mental health history, suicidality, counseling history, and medical history.

Of the 215 clients seen, 190 were Muslim (88%). The findings reported in this paper are based on the Muslim clients ($n = 190$), of which ten percent were converts to Islam. As far as the gender breakdown, 65% were female and 35% were male. Eighty percent of the Muslim clients were adults (age 18 or older), and 20% were children (between the ages of 7-17).

DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected retrospectively from all client records in my private practice from January 2001 to mid-April 2006. In order to protect the confidentiality of the clients, only I had access to the files. Data was extracted from the files and entered into a spreadsheet, using numerical coding to identify each client record.

The following information was extracted from each file: the presenting problem (what the client identified during the initial contact with the therapist as being the problem); whether the client reported any domestic violence at any time during the course of therapy; the role of the client in the abuse; whether the abuse was current at the time of counseling or occurred in the past; and the type of abuse reported. If

more than one presenting problem was indicated, the primary problem was recorded for this study so that each client is associated with only one presenting problem. In cases where multiple members of one family were seen together, the family unit would count as one client, and reports of abuse would be counted once for each type of abuse reported, and would be associated with that one client.

The client was considered to have reported domestic violence if the therapist identified behaviors consistent with domestic violence, including cases where the client reported those behaviors but did not recognize them as abusive or as domestic violence. For example, when one client family was asked if conflicts ever escalated to the point of hitting, yelling or shoving, each member denied it. Yet when the father was asked what interventions he had tried to use in dealing with his defiant teenager, he stated that he had punched and hit his child. Although the father categorized his behavior as disciplinary rather than abusive, the therapist considered his statement to be an admission of physical abuse.

CATEGORIES OF ABUSE

The types of abuse categorized were "Physical," "Verbal," "Emotional," and "Sexual." Physical abuse included any reports of pushing, shoving, hitting, pulling hair, or inflicting any type of physical injury. It also included reports of the abuser throwing objects that had the potential to cause physical injury if the victim were to step into the direct path of that object. The range of physical abuse is very broad, with a push or a shove on one side of the continuum, and a fatal or severe injury, such as a stabbing, or banging someone's head against a wall occupying the other extreme.

It is difficult to make a clear distinction between verbal and emotional abuse. These two types of abuse seem to go hand in hand, as it is difficult to imagine being verbally abused without being intimidated or feeling threatened, or being threatened and intimidated without the use of words. However, it is possible in some cases that neglect as a form of emotional abuse may not be accompanied by verbal abuse. Verbal abuse includes name-calling, insults, and being cursed. Emotional abuse includes financial deprivation, isolation, threats and intimidation, humiliation, destruction of personal valuables/property, and spiritual abuse, which refers to the use of religious beliefs and values to manipulate and control another person. For example, repeatedly telling a woman that she is a bad Muslim, and that she will be punished in hell because she is not patient, quiet and submissive during abusive episodes may lead a woman to withstand the abuse, especially if she believes that her husband is more knowledgeable than she. Another form of spiritual abuse is the misuse of religious texts by taking verses out of context, or misinterpreting them in order to control the other person's behavior. In this study, spiritual abuse was included under emotional abuse, and was not measured as a separate category.

Sexual abuse included any reports of unwanted or inappropriate sexual behavior. For example, a wife's report of being forced to have sex with her husband,

whether he forced her by applying psychological pressure or physical pressure, was categorized as sexual abuse. Another example would be if a relative touched the client in any sexual manner, including touching private parts, kissing in a sexual manner, or making the client witness sexual acts.

DATA ANALYSIS

In analyzing the data regarding the role of the client in the violence, clients were categorized as "Victims"⁵ if they were recipients of physical, verbal, emotional or sexual abuse. They were categorized as "Perpetrators" if they were court-referred as a result of an assault charge, if they self-disclosed perpetrating any type of abuse, or if the therapist became aware of abusive behavior during the course of therapy; regardless of whether the client actually admitted being abusive. In some cases, a client could be both a victim and a perpetrator, and would then be categorized under "Mutual." For example, a woman who lived in constant fear of her husband's beatings, and his breaking windows and furniture, admitted that she beat her daughter and chased her with a kitchen knife, in addition to constantly criticizing her and putting her down. Another example in which a client could be both a perpetrator and a victim would be a couple in which each spouse abused the other by threatening each other, hitting each other, and trying to control each other's behaviors. In these cases, both spouses may have turned to the police for intervention. The role of "Witness" was used to categorize clients who did not directly experience any type of abuse, but reported witnessing someone in their family being abused. Typically, the reports of witnessing abuse were incidental in the telling of the story, and have most likely been under-reported by clients who did not recognize witnessing abuse as relevant to their current problem.

Due to the large number of presenting problems, the categories were coded and collapsed to produce seven general categories: "Marital Conflict," "Family Conflict," "Mood Disorders," "Anxiety Disorders," "Child Behavioral Problems," "Domestic Violence," and "Other." "Marital Conflict" included any type of problem reported as a conflict between spouses, ranging from communication issues, to separation and divorce, to extra-marital affairs. "Family Conflict" included parent-child conflict, conflict with in-laws, conflict related to the mental illness of a

⁵ For ease of writing this paper, the terms abuser and perpetrator are used interchangeably, as are the terms victim and survivor. In no way is this usage meant to suggest that individuals are no more than these labels, that a victim of domestic violence is limited to being a victim, or that a person committing abuse has no other facet to his/her personality other than committing abuse. I fully recognize that each of these individuals is a whole person that is multi-faceted and that their individual personalities extend far beyond the limits of a particular label.

family member, parental conflict, and parental divorce. Violence and/or domestic abuse were not mentioned as part of the conflict in order to be designated in this category. Typically, a client might say, "I'm having trouble getting along with...", or, "I want to learn how to improve my relationship with...", or, "My husband/wife/child/relative is giving me a hard time."

"Mood Disorders" included all types of depressive and bipolar disorders. "Anxiety Disorders" included all types of anxiety disorders and anxiety-based disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorders and phobias. "Child Behavioral Disorders" included children with any type of academic or behavioral problem, and any type of oppositional behaviors and disorders. "Domestic Violence" included any type of physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse as defined above, as well as issues like forced marriage or forced career choice, where the victim was unable to voice or enforce his or her own choice. Finally, the category of "Other Disorders" was used to include those problems that presented less frequently, and did not warrant a separate category. Examples of such problems include post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, self-mutilation, shop-lifting, sexual dysfunction, chronic illness, parenting education, pre-marital counseling, and family reunification. That is not to say that these issues were not actually prevalent among the clients, but that they were not identified by the client as the focus of treatment. In some cases, the therapist would identify an issue, like substance abuse, and make it a focus of treatment later in the therapy. Due to the fact that the sample of clients were mostly those who strongly self-identified as Muslims, and were looking for a therapist with similar values and beliefs, issues like substance abuse may not have been as prevalent as in a more mainstream setting that might also serve Muslims.⁶

Since Muslim clients come from so many countries, the ethnic categories were also collapsed to create the following categories: "Arab," "South Asian," "African-American," "White," "Afghan," "Iranian," and "Other." Bi-cultural categories of "Arab/Other," and "South-Asian/Other" were also used in order to include those clients who self-identified as bicultural. "Arabs" consisted of clients who self-identified as coming from any Arabic-speaking country. "South Asians" were clients who identified themselves as coming from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, or Kashmir. The "Other" category included a wide range of ethnic groups that did not comprise significant numbers, such as Latino, Turkish, Chinese, and Korean.

The data from all the clients was entered into a spreadsheet. Data from the

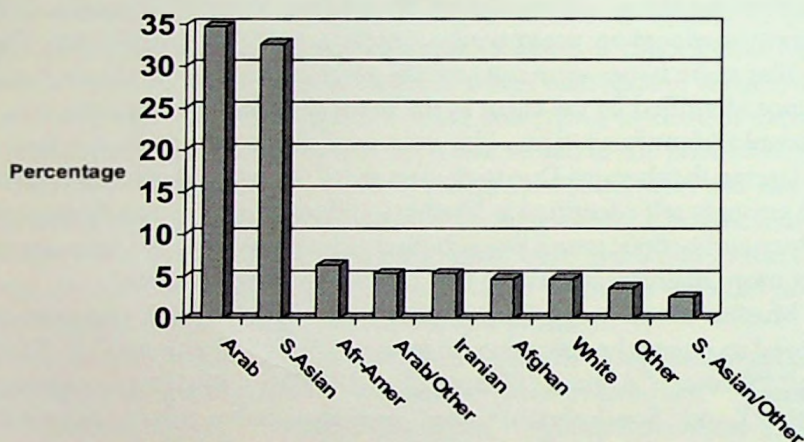
⁶ Islam prohibits the consumption of alcohol. There are Muslims who do not adhere to this prohibition, and therefore may prefer to seek counseling from a therapist who does not identify as a practicing Muslim, or they may not report their use of substances to a Muslim counselor. Other Muslims who consume alcohol still prefer a Muslim therapist who will understand the impact of religious and cultural issues.

Muslim clients was then separated and analyzed using SPSS 13.0 for Windows software.

RESULTS

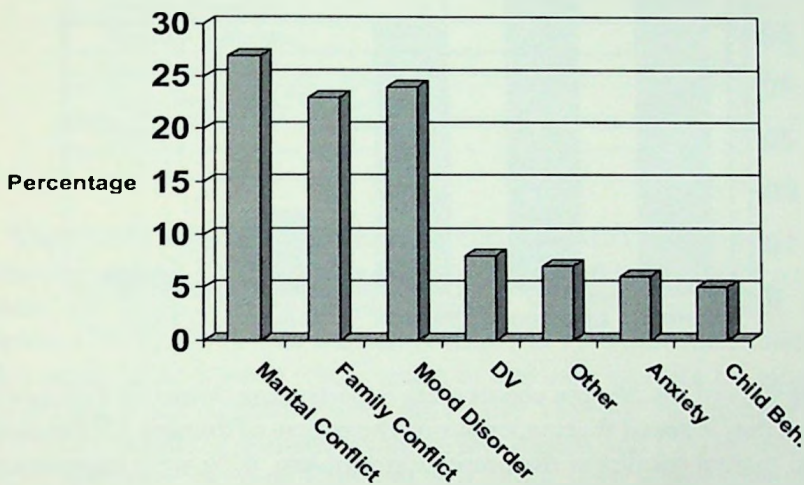
The predominant ethnic groups in this study were Arab Americans (35%) and South Asian Americans (33%). The remaining ethnic groups were clustered, with no group exceeding 10%. See Graph 1.

GRAPH 1
ETHNIC BACKGROUND



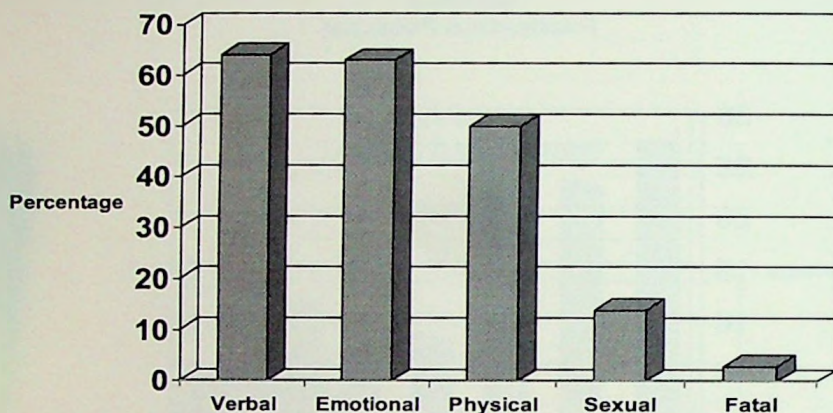
The top three presenting problems for Muslim clients in this study were "Marital Conflict" (27%), "Family Conflict" (23%), and "Mood Disorders" (24%) (see Graph 2). The next three categories of presenting problems were significantly less in frequency and closely clustered: "Anxiety Disorders" (6%), "Other" (7%), and "Child Behavioral Problems" (5%). "Domestic Violence" was a presenting problem in 8% of the clients. Half of the clients sought therapy for some type of conflict, either with a spouse or with another family member.

GRAPH 2
PRESENTING PROBLEM



Based on the therapists' observation of client reports as therapy progressed, behaviors consistent with domestic violence often became apparent, even if the client did not recognize or acknowledge being impacted by abuse. Verbal and emotional abuse were the most prevalent, with 64% of clients reporting some type of verbal abuse, and 63% of clients reporting some type of emotional abuse. Clients may have reported multiple types of abuse (see Graph 3). Physical abuse was reported by 50% of the Muslim clients. Sexual abuse was reported by 14% of the Muslim clients. Three percent of the Muslim clients reported having a family member killed as a result of a domestic dispute. In those cases, multiple family members may have been affected by the murder of the same individual, and may have sought both family and individual therapy to deal with the aftermath.

GRAPH 3
TYPE OF ABUSE



A total of 41% of the Muslim clients were experiencing domestic violence either at the time they initiated therapy, or during the course of therapy. Of the clients who indicated marital conflict as the presenting problem, 61% were experiencing abuse at the time of therapy; and 14% reported experiencing some form of abuse in the past (See Table 1). Of those clients who reported family conflict as a presenting problem, 35% were experiencing abuse at the time of therapy; and 33% reported past abuse. Among the clients presenting with mood disorders, 35% reported experiencing current abuse, while 28% reported some form of past abuse. For those clients indicating anxiety as the presenting problem, 17% reported current abuse and 33% reported past abuse. Of the clients who initiated therapy due to domestic violence, 56% were currently experiencing abuse while 44% had experienced past abuse. Among the children presenting with behavioral problems, 22% were experiencing some form of abuse.⁷ In the "Other" presenting problem category, 23% of clients reported present abuse and 23% reported past abuse. Some clients reported both past and present abuse, so these clients are reflected in both categories.

⁷ If the child was suspected to be experiencing physical abuse, then a report was made to Child Protective Services in accordance with mandatory reporting laws.

Table 1 - Percentage of Clients Who Experienced Present or Past Abuse According to Presenting Problem

Presenting Problem	Present Abuse	Past Abuse
Marital Conflict	61%	14%
Family Conflict	35%	33%
Mood Disorder	35%	28%
Anxiety Disorder	17%	33%
Domestic Violence	56%	44%
Child Behavioral Problem	22%	0%
Other	23%	23%

There were significant gender differences regarding the roles of perpetrator, victim and witness. Of the total number of clients in the study, 48% reported being victims. Of those, 71% were adult females and 5% were female children. In contrast, 12% of the victims were adult male and 11% were male children. Clearly, in this study, adult women were victims of domestic violence far more than men. This finding is not surprising since the Family Violence Prevention Fund reports that 85% of victims of domestic violence are women, and 15% are men (2005). The notable difference between boys and girls in this study is that more than twice as many boys (11%) than girls (5%) were victims. However, according to the Children's Bureau of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2004), boys accounted for 48% of child victims and girls accounted for 52%. This discrepancy may be due to the small sample size in this study, as well as the fact that this study includes data from families voluntarily seeking counseling, while the Children's Bureau collected data from Child Protective Services. In addition, the difference may be accounted for by the fact that boys are more likely to act out in aggressive or disruptive ways than girls; increasing the likelihood that they would be brought in to therapy (this study included 23 boys and 15 girls).

Regarding the role of perpetrator, 8 percent of the clients fit this category. Twenty-five percent of the perpetrators were female and 75% were male. Fifteen percent of the clients reported witnessing some type of domestic violence; with 47% of the witnesses being female and 53% being male. The number of clients who witnessed abuse is lower than expected, as one would expect the majority of both victims and perpetrators to have witnessed domestic violence in their families of origin. It is quite likely that clients were under-reporting their experiences of witnessing abuse for a variety of reasons.

DISCUSSION

The sample of participants in this study are from a population of Muslim Americans seeking therapy in a private practice setting for a wide range of emotional and mental health concerns. It is possible that this population has a higher incidence of domestic violence than Muslims who are not seeking therapy. For that reason, caution should be used when generalizing the numbers derived from this study to the general, non-clinical Muslim population in the United States. In addition, the Northern Virginia region of the country differs in some ways from other regions of the country. One difference is demographic, since the general population of mosque-going Muslims in the United States includes 30% African Americans, compared to only 6% in this study (CAIR 2005). The particular community from which most of the clients came is ethnically diverse, highly educated, and highly acculturated, with most clients living in the suburbs. These factors vary greatly among Muslim communities across the U.S., and may have influenced the results of this study.

Nevertheless, the results of this study draw attention to the prevalence of domestic violence in Muslim families, debunking a popularly-held myth that exists among some Muslims that their community is immune to this social problem. That myth includes the belief that the concept of domestic violence was created by male-hating feminists, and that Muslims should separate themselves from such Western notions. People also confuse the practices of Muslims, whose adherence to Islam varies, with the tenets of Islam, which if fully practiced would prevent and eliminate all forms of domestic violence. Both of these dynamics prevent people from learning about an issue that they believe is irrelevant to their lives.

The number of people affected by domestic violence in this study is just a small subset of the total number of Muslims in the United States that are affected. The fact that at least half of the clients seeking counseling had experienced some form of domestic violence during their lifetime makes it imperative for Muslim communities to address this issue that affects so many of its members. Furthermore, it is disconcerting that only a fraction of clients who experienced abuse actually identified it as a presenting problem. This trend most likely stems from the fact that many people do not know how to identify domestic violence, and many do not even acknowledge that Muslims can be affected by this issue. Among clients that do have some idea about the issue of domestic violence, there is some difficulty accepting that they themselves might be victims or perpetrators. If there is some acknowledgement, then there is usually a denial of the impact that the violence has had on their current functioning. The reluctance to disclose domestic violence and to accept being a victim is not unique to Muslims, and is consistent with national data about domestic violence (Rice 2006).

CULTURAL ISSUES

While Islam as a worldview prohibits oppression and injustice in society as a whole and in the family unit in particular, the variation of cultural norms within the diversity of Muslim families makes the issue of defining abuse and abusive behavior somewhat complex. Caution should be used before automatically concluding that "different" practices are "abusive" practices. Some practices that may be red flags in American culture may be perfectly acceptable and healthy in other cultures. For example, in cultures where men primarily interface with the public, and are the sole breadwinners in the family, women may not have any experience writing checks or have any idea of the family finances. In cash-based societies, putting money in a bank is completely alien, and money is stored in jars at home or under mattresses. When a woman from one of these cultures ends up telling a therapist in the United States that she has no idea how much money her husband makes, and that she has never written a check, the therapist might falsely assume that she is a victim of financial abuse, when in fact, she may have lived very comfortably, and without any of the financial worries that some women in the United States often have.

In addition to different cultural practices that exist among Muslims, there are other unique issues that need to be considered. Due to the general low level of awareness about domestic violence, victims may not realize that they are in an abusive relationship. The results from this study clearly show that domestic violence was present in many cases where the clients themselves did not identify or even recognize the symptoms. Cultural taboos in Eastern countries discourage talking about abuse, especially if it is sexual. One woman who had been sexually abused by a family servant denied the impact that abuse had on her life, and stated that her mother and other women in the family had endured the same fate, as if the abuse was to be expected. Still another woman said that she did not realize she was being abused until she read the description of domestic violence on a poster in a shopping center, and recognized the description as pertaining to her own life. A man, who had difficulty understanding why he had been arrested for beating his teenage daughter, described witnessing his father dragging his mother by her hair, and witnessing male neighbors slapping their wives. Such statements indicate the extremely low level of awareness about the behaviors and dynamics that are part of domestic violence, even in a population that is mostly well-educated and acculturated into American society.

Many Muslims originate from countries in which the government and government agencies (including law enforcement) cannot be trusted. Although mistrust of the government has always been an obstacle for some immigrant groups in seeking services, this mistrust has grown post 9/11 with the changes in policies related to the Patriot Act and other legislation. Before 9/11, part of the intervention with victims was to correct some of the misconceptions that may have interfered with

seeking legal protection for fear that children would be removed from the home or abusers would be deported. In a post 9/11 era, some of these fears are justified and may be a real deterrent to women who are in need of legal protection.

Aside from under-reporting abuse to police and under-utilizing legal resources to gain protection from abuse, there are cultural and religious teachings that may prevent some victims from disclosing the abuse to anyone, including other family members. Traditionally, women in Middle Eastern cultures have been held responsible for the success or failure of a marriage. Given the high value placed on marriage, and the stigma attached to divorce, women may suffer in silence for many years. Many young couples are instructed to keep their problems to themselves. Even within the context of therapy, some clients are very careful not to "backbite" about their parents and/or a relative, limiting the information disclosed to what they believe is necessary for the therapist to be helpful. Speaking ill of others is clearly prohibited in the Qur'an except if injustice has occurred (4:148). Cultural norms make it shameful to air "dirty laundry" with an outsider.

In the event that domestic violence was reported to legal authorities, clients often reported unanticipated negative repercussions. Many clients were not familiar with the law and were devastated when the abuser (male or female) was arrested, or when they discovered they could not drop the charges once a police report was filed. Other clients reported receiving criticism from religious authorities or relatives for using the legal system against a family member. The abuser in most cases would perceive a police report as the ultimate betrayal; and this betrayal then would overshadow the actual abuse that was committed. For example, an abuser who was furious that his wife had escaped his control and had been able to make a life for herself and her children, complained about her to his imam. He focused on her "crime" of reporting him to the police, having him arrested, and reporting him to the child support enforcement agency who garnered his wages. The imam responded by scolding her for betraying her husband to the legal system, never asking her what led her to seek legal protection. It was only after being berated by both her husband and the imam that she finally burst out, "I only called the police because you were chasing me with a knife and threatening to kill me. What was I supposed to do?"

Both religious and cultural values reinforce the importance of the family unit; cultural values in many non-Western cultures may prioritize group needs over individual needs. The family structure in most Muslim families, with the elders being respected and consulted during important decisions, can be both a resource to families, and a source of support, as well as a roadblock if the extended family does not understand the dynamics of domestic violence. Victims may turn to the extended family for advice and support, and major decisions are often significantly impacted by the family's response. In one case, for example, a woman who was being abused by her physician husband reported her situation to her parents. They immediately intervened by bringing her back home, protecting her from her

husband, and helping her through the divorce process. Another woman, abused by her police officer husband, complained to her brother. Her brother told her that if she did not behave better with her husband, and complained again, he himself would beat her. In the case of a man who was abused by his wife, his family mocked him for letting a woman get the best of him. They minimized the impact of the abuse and discouraged him from divorcing her until they discovered the children were also being abused. These examples illustrate the range of responses that can occur within Muslim families.

Understanding the cultural issues is very helpful in identifying appropriate interventions. It is important to recognize and accept that many Muslim victims, especially women, are not interested in leaving the abusive relationship. They are mainly interested in getting the abuse to stop, and preserving the marriage if at all possible. As they learn that they may not be able to get the abuser to change, they wrestle with some very difficult decisions. Focusing on the children's well-being often makes the decision-making process easier, and clearer, since many women have been accustomed to thinking of others before thinking of themselves. Many women from non-Western backgrounds have told me that as adults, their life is over and no longer relevant; it is the lives of the children that have priority, and they will usually do whatever is necessary to ensure the children's well-being. Education about the long-term impact of abuse on children is often needed since many parents believe that a two-parent home of any kind, even one that is filled with violence, is better for a child than a single-parent home that is peaceful and safe.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: NOT A "WOMEN'S ISSUE"

Domestic violence is often considered a women's problem: women complain that they are the victims; women need to find the solution. In addition, women's behaviors are often pointed to as the cause for men's violence against them. For example, a common question posed to female victims is, "What did you do to make him hit you?" Holding women accountable for the violence committed against them is a grave error because it re-victimizes the recipient of abuse. Domestic violence is actually everyone's problem: the victim, the perpetrator, and the larger community.

It is clear that domestic violence affects both men and women. While most adult victims are women, men can also be victims. In this study, while the vast majority of the victims were women, 12% of the victims were men and 11% of the victims were boys. The number of perpetrators in this study is low due to the fact that perpetrators rarely seek treatment voluntarily. Victims often do not file police reports or seek legal protection, which is the only route towards mandating abusers to receive treatment, and usually occurs in a certified batterers' intervention program. Even in cases when treatment is court-ordered, some abusers find a way to avoid participating in the treatment by somehow evading the system. Such abusers may end up with a ruling of non-compliance in their records and have to pay fines or serve jail time. While such abusers do face a consequence, the victim and other

family members still suffer from the loss of the family, and from the psychological impact of witnessing or experiencing abuse.

Although the victims in this study were often incredible in their strength and courage, the suffering they experienced is truly debilitating. Witnessing the effect that chronic abuse has had on these individuals is quite painful; whether it is the story of a successful female physician who is afraid to go home after treating patients all day because she anticipates her husband will greet her with insults and beatings, or whether it is the story of a mother of two young children who is terrorized by the father stalking her and threatening to kill her because she reported his abusive behavior. Despite the fact that abuse may have a significant long-term impact, sometimes it is only discovered when the survivor seeks mental health services for other problems years after the abuse has ended. For instance, several women clients presented with depression and marital problems. Over time, a history of incest by their fathers or another close male relative was revealed as the source of their current mental health issues. The previous abuse had never been addressed due to the secrecy and fear instilled in them by the perpetrator. In another example, couples therapy revealed that a husband who was abusive to his wife had grown up in a home with violence so severe, it included the murder of two close relatives, yet he had never received any therapy to address the trauma. Meanwhile, such clients, who have had a history of experiencing domestic violence as children, often experienced a lifetime struggling with self-esteem issues, social problems, sometimes substance abuse, and even promiscuity as a result of their shattered realities.

In this study, the type of abuse experienced by men is similar to that experienced by women. Men can be victims of verbal, emotional, physical and sexual abuse, although the number of adult male victims is far less than adult female victims. Nevertheless, the impact on them is just as great. Men have reported feeling intimidated and afraid of abusive wives. One man reported that he never slept until after his wife fell asleep, for fear she would hurt him during his sleep. He reported her attempts to poison him, and revealed scars from incidents in which she had bitten him. This man, like many victims, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, was unable to keep his job, and was barely able to function in daily life. Male victims report feeling extremely humiliated as a result of being physically abused, and they are even less likely than women to report abuse. These victims may have been abused as children, either within their family or from a trusted adult in the community. Sometimes, they have been bullied at school. Regardless of the source, boys who are abused may feel weak, and struggle with identity issues in a society that values strength and aggression in males. They also tend to have low self-esteem, may suffer academically and socially, and may struggle to create healthy relationships. Many of these boys may turn to substances to numb the pain.

IMPACT OF ABUSE

It is clear from the results of this study that domestic violence is positively correlated with all of the presenting problems categorized in this study. These findings are consistent with the American Psychiatric Association's determination in 2005 that domestic violence can lead to a wide range of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder. While it was very rare for a client in the present study to come to a counseling session with visible injuries due to an abusive incident, the psychological scars were very clear.

More than half of the clients in this study who presented with marital problems were actually living in an abusive relationship. More than one third of clients who presented with family conflict, depression, or anxiety reported either past or present abuse. The abuse was more often emotional/verbal than physical, and the victims consequently often suffered from depression or anxiety. Some clients also reported somatic complaints, including headaches, shoulder and neck pain, tightness in the chest, and ringing in the ears. In addition to their own suffering, victims who were also parents frequently reported decreased tolerance for their children's misbehavior, feeling overwhelmed with parenting, and difficulty focusing on tasks that needed to be done. Sometimes, extended family members were also impacted as they would be called upon to intervene. In some cases, such intervention was helpful; in other cases, it exacerbated the abuse.

TREATMENT

In this study, clients seeking counseling received client-centered services in which they determined their own treatment goals, and determined the issues to focus on during therapy. However, in the event that domestic violence became identified as an issue, the therapist intervened by assessing risk and helping the victim to develop a safety plan.⁸ In such cases, safety became the primary focus of treatment. Victims were provided with information regarding a wide range of services, including how to obtain a protective order if needed. Muslims are often resistant to the suggestion of seeking legal protection, believing it is wrong to take a fellow Muslim to court, and that any intervention should be done through their family members or the mosque. Muslim communities and leadership may reinforce this belief by blaming victims who seek protection from the courts.

⁸ A safety plan refers to an individualized plan for victims to protect and prepare themselves in the event they need to escape a dangerous situation. Planning includes identifying escape routes, people to call, somewhere to stay, gathering important documents and setting aside money. It may also include identifying shelters where women are safe from their abuser, as well as a referral to a shelter if needed.

Once safety was established, or at least a safety plan was developed, interventions centered on educating and empowering the survivor of abuse. Using Islamic teachings as a resource played a significant role in the treatment of domestic violence for clients in this study. Since most of the clients in this study had sought out a practicing Muslim therapist, they valued having the Islamic perspective included in their treatment approach. Referring to divine instruction made it easier for clients to consider options that otherwise may have been dismissed. Often, people focus on one aspect of Islam at the exclusion of another, leading to confusion or distorted understanding. Taking teachings out of context is done by abusers to justify their behavior. Helping clients look at the teachings as a whole leads to a more balanced view. For example, while it is true that Muslims should cover each other's faults, it is also true that Muslims are responsible for helping both the victim (oppressed) and the perpetrator (oppressor) of abuse according to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) (Sahih Muslim, Book #32, Hadith #6254).

Muslim clients were directed towards teachings in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*⁹ that explicitly prohibit oppression and injustice, provide guidance for those suffering from oppression, illustrate the model of an Islamic marriage and family, and clarify gender roles. Both men and women were encouraged to study the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* to gain a clearer understanding of Islamic behavior. Clients who acted abusively were directed towards teachings that provided preferred ways of behaving and relating to others. Interventions that protected or prevented them from committing further acts of oppression were identified and explored. Interventions may have included a temporary separation from the spouse, time outs, attending a batterer intervention program, attending a religious education program, or any other intervention that effectively prevented further abuse.

ROLE OF IMAMS AND OTHER LEADERS

Since the majority of people in this study were seeking help due to relationship problems with a spouse or relative, and many of the people had initially sought counseling from an imam, it is imperative that Muslim leaders who provide counseling be informed about the dynamics of domestic violence, as well as appropriate interventions and resources. In a survey of 22 mosques in New York, 96% of worshippers perceived that imams play the role of counselor (Abu-Ras and Gheith 2006). The researchers found that 74% of the participants sought counseling for safety issues from imams, 49% for anxiety, 44% for emotional issues, and 30% for depression problems. The researchers also noted that most imams have no training

⁹ Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), including examples of the way he lived his life.

in Western psychotherapy. While Western psychotherapy certainly does not have all the answers, nor is it always the most appropriate treatment approach, it is important for imams to have effective tools to help them fulfill the role of counselor that they are often called on to provide. Not only do imams need to have some understanding of general mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, but they also need to have the skill to assess for the presence of domestic violence. If domestic violence is an issue, then imams need to have the skills to assess lethality, to help the victim develop a safety plan, and to maintain strict confidentiality of the victims' plan in order to protect her safety. They should also identify appropriate referral services to address needs that are beyond the scope of their role as an imam. Referral services might include mental health professionals, physicians, family law attorneys, shelters, food banks, etc.

At least 20% of the clients in the current study had gone to the mosque first for counseling, and were referred by an imam once emotional issues, trauma, or domestic violence were identified. Some of the clients in abusive relationships had been to multiple imams, family elders, and/or community leaders over the course of several years, only to be told to be patient, strengthen their faith, or be more accommodating. Victims of abuse who are given this advice without any acknowledgement of the injustice they are suffering, or any attention to their safety and well-being, are at risk of being unintentionally re-victimized and re-traumatized. It is not unusual for some clients to become so frustrated and disheartened by the lack of appropriate intervention from within the Muslim community that they turn away from Islam, mistakenly blaming God for the lack of support, rather than blaming the leaders' lack of knowledge and skills. When the religious community causes this kind of harm, the person suffering from abuse is deprived of one of the best resources that can help them cope through difficult times. Many clients have identified their faith as the only thing that has kept them going, believing with certainty that God would take care of them, and that their suffering would be rewarded. Faith is also critical in helping victims feel certain that the abuser will ultimately be held accountable, and receive just penalty in the hereafter, even if they are not able to achieve justice in this world. That belief facilitates healing and the process of forgiveness that is crucial to the victim living a healthy, productive life free of emotional problems once she or he is no longer in the abusive relationship.

Given the number of clients in this study who were either experiencing domestic violence at the time of treatment, or had experienced some form of abuse in the past, it is clear that experiencing violence in the home has both a short-term and a long-term psychological impact. For those who have experienced or witnessed abuse as children, there can be a negative impact on future relationships, in addition to potentially contributing to the development of mental health disorders, such as depression. Although that is not a new piece of information for mental health professionals and domestic violence advocates, many Muslim leaders are not aware of the fact. It is one of the reasons that victims of domestic violence may not only be given minimal support, but may also be sent back home to be more patient and

more loving to a husband that has been reported as being verbally, physically, or emotionally abusive. It is my hope that as Muslim leaders recognize the prevalence of domestic violence in their communities, and understand the damaging consequences of encouraging women to remain in abusive relationships, they will take a strong stand against any form of domestic abuse.

A strong stand should include holding the abuser accountable for the oppression of another human being. Accountability includes enforcing a consequence for the abuser, such as removing him from a position he may hold in the community; insisting he attend a batterer intervention program or therapy; insisting he make retribution for any injury (physical or emotional) that he caused; and preventing him from access to his family until their safety can be guaranteed. A stand against domestic violence includes communicating clearly through the Friday *khutbah* (sermon) that God does not accept any kind of harsh treatment, let alone physical, verbal, psychological or sexual violence. Mosque leadership should make it clear that abuse of family members is not only a crime, but a sin.¹⁰

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

There are several limitations to this study, given its retrospective nature. Clients were not administered any type of formal instrument to assess for domestic violence. Each client was asked about violence in their home as part of the routine background information obtained during their initial visit. Most of the clients who had experienced, or were experiencing, domestic violence disclosed that information as their therapy progressed. Sometimes the disclosure came months after the beginning of treatment. Often, the clients themselves did not label the reported behavior as abusive or violent.

Another limitation of this study is that outcome measures were not included. While assessing lethality and developing a safety plan are standard treatment interventions for domestic violence (Rice 2006), there is no data to assess the effectiveness of using Qur'anic teachings to prevent further abuse from occurring. Couples were not tracked to determine whether, or when, the abuse ended, how many of the couples ended in divorce, and how many were able to end the abuse and maintain their marriage.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the fact that there is scant research in this area, it goes without saying that more research is needed to further assess the impact of domestic violence in

¹⁰ For an overview of Islamic teachings from the Qur'an and Sunnah that prohibit all types of family violence and abuse, see *What Islam Says About Domestic Violence* by Zainab Alwani and Salma Abugideiri.

the Muslim American community. Research should include both mosque-going and non-mosque-going Muslims, and should examine the role that religion may play in contributing to the incidence of domestic violence, as well as the role religion may play in preventing abuse. Some researchers, such as Ellison and Anderson (2001) in their study of religious involvement and domestic violence among U.S. couples, have documented that regular attendance at religious services is inversely correlated to the perpetration of domestic violence. This finding should not be taken to support the myth that "religious" people do not commit abuse, as it is clear from the current study that many mosque-going Muslims are either victims or perpetrators of violence. Rather, Ellison and Anderson's findings should be used to reinforce the important role that mosques can play in providing appropriate guidance and education to prevent abuse. As the authors of the study noted, sometimes religious institutions actually contribute to abuse by emphasizing the importance of marriage without providing education about healthy relationships, or providing options for people experiencing abuse to come forward and seek counseling. It is imperative that Muslim leaders use their authority and credibility to promote a zero-tolerance policy for violence and abuse.

Research is needed to examine Muslims' utilization of, and accessibility to, domestic violence services. Also, studies that assess the unique needs of Muslims, the role of past trauma in abusive relationships, the correlation of substance abuse with domestic violence, and effective interventions are needed to fill the gap in the literature. Families should be tracked once they have received services to determine how many are able to save their marriages and develop healthy relationships, and how many can only stop the abuse by ending the marriage. Interviews with survivors should document what interventions were most helpful, and what type of service provider offered these interventions.

CONCLUSION

This study of Muslims seeking counseling from a Muslim therapist illustrates the correlation of domestic violence and mental health issues. It brings attention to the need for Muslim communities to break the silence that has historically surrounded this issue, and to recognize domestic violence as a form of oppression, a crime, and a sin. Muslim communities and their leaders need to recognize the far-reaching negative consequences of this social illness. Every day, and in every community, individuals like Sophia and her son struggle to survive the repercussions of family violence. And every day, in every community, helping professionals and community members struggle to make sense of this destructive phenomenon.

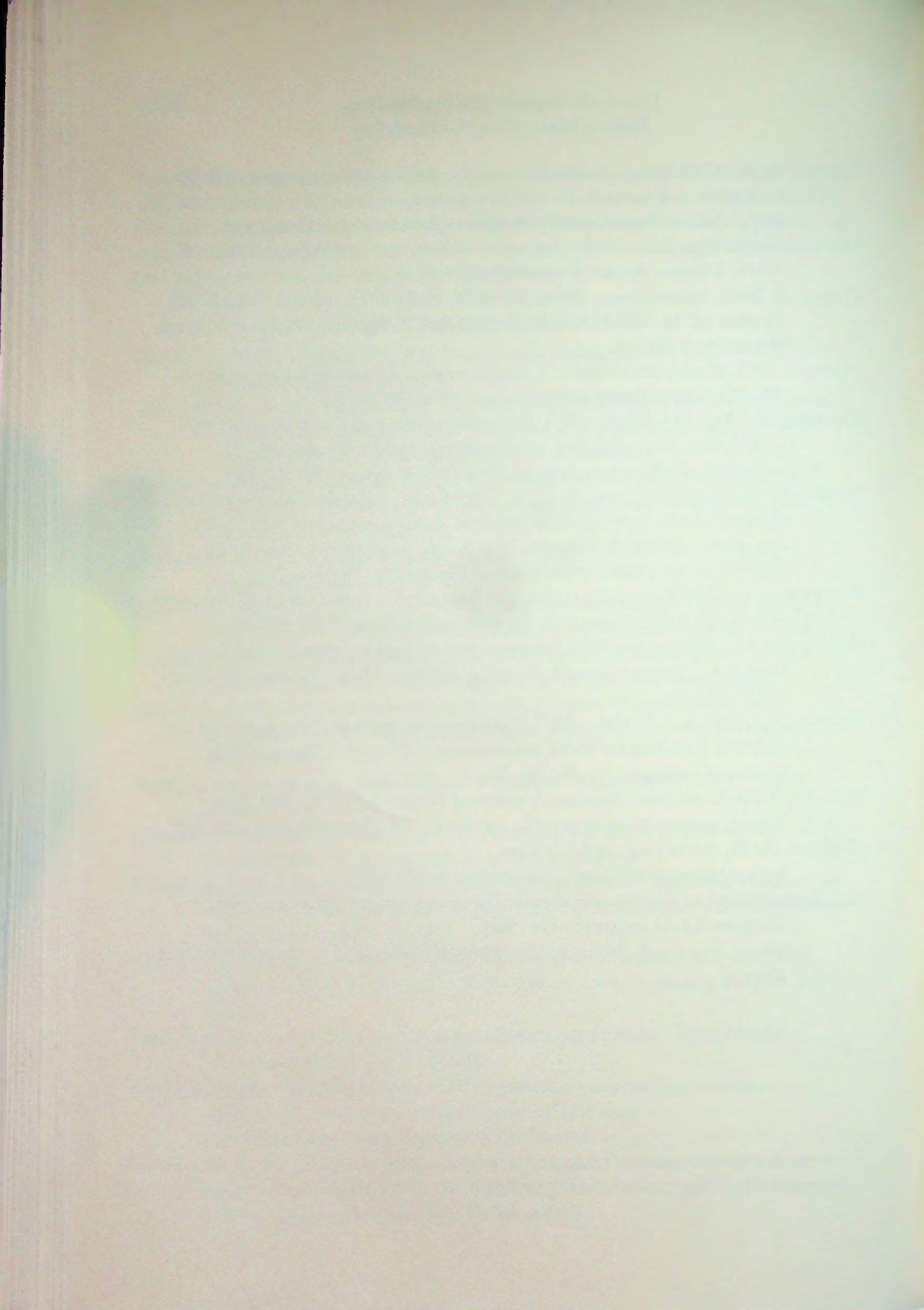
The Muslim community can find guidance for the prevention of domestic violence within the Islamic worldview. Islam is a religion grounded in justice and mercy; and it is a religion that values and promotes healthy individuals and peaceful families. Islam encourages us to be proactive members of a society and to use any and all appropriate tools to end oppression. Muslim communities who insist on

denying the existence of this social problem are enabling the spread of oppression and the destruction of their communities through the destruction of the family. It is time for Muslims to collaborate with other Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, to establish healthy and vibrant communities that can only exist through the protection and promotion of healthy and peaceful families.

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FREEDOM IS ONLY WON FROM THE INSIDE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN POST-CONFLICT AFGHANISTAN

By Lina Abirafeh

Conflict in Afghanistan has had a disproportionately negative impact on women. Afghan women have borne the brunt of the violence and remain subjected to practices that reflect gender biases. While the international community still hopes to “liberate” and “empower” Afghan women in so-called post-conflict Afghanistan, gender¹ programs are struggling to take *gender* (in a robust sense of the word) into account (UNDP 2001). Afghan women are fighting to reverse perceptions that they have no agency, that they are victims. Yet they are experiencing increased levels of violence. Despite being four years beyond conflict and into peace in Afghanistan, violence against women – particularly domestic violence – appears to be increasing.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted through the lens of both an international aid worker and an academic. Research in Afghanistan incorporates firsthand sources as well as documents, articles, and reports collected since 2002. Much of the data has been collected for a dissertation examining the effects of gender-focused international aid on women and men in post-conflict Afghanistan.² Data collection consisted of interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions in Kabul with gender policymakers and practitioners.³ The bulk of the data emerges from interviews with

¹ In this context, gender refers to women and men in their socially constructed roles. Gender roles vary between and within cultures – and between different types of men and women. Gender roles are socially constructed concepts, and are therefore dynamic. A change in gender roles might not necessarily instigate a change in gender *relations*.

² Abirafeh is pursuing her Ph.D. under the auspices of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Development Studies Institute (DESTIN). She expects to complete the process in 2007.

³ The gender policymakers and practitioners from the dissertation study are Afghan and expatriate women and men who are heads of international agencies, gender focal points, gender program implementers, heads of Afghan women’s NGOs, and others.

71 Afghan women who are participants in development programs.⁴ Further, 50 Afghan men were interviewed to collect their views on gender-focused interventions. All names have been withheld.

CONTEXTUALIZING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

Twenty-three years of social, economic, and political conflict have resulted in a vacuum where national and individual security should exist. Security is cited by the Afghan government - and both women and men - as the most pressing concern. For women, this entails a robust definition of security to include all aspects of human security - not just a life free of violence but also one where basic needs are met and fundamental rights are respected and safeguarded (UNDP and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 2004). In so-called post-conflict Afghanistan, reversions to violence are not unusual. In fact, conflicts are often circuitous in nature and violence - particularly violence against women - and may continue long after peace agreements have been signed. As a result of present insecurities, women's confidence and decision-making power remains weak. Analysts and experts have called for a remedy to the deteriorating security situation, particularly as it presents the most significant impediment to women's full exercise of their human rights (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2004). Despite these pleas, a culture of violence pervades, and women have increasingly less control of their lives.

A BRIEF HISTORY LESSON

In order to best understand the situation of women in Afghanistan today, one must begin with a little history lesson. An analysis of Afghan history demonstrates that women's rights have always been highly politicized, and that gender politics, as much as geo-politics, has provided the impetus for conflicts. It is said that *zan wa zameen*, women and land, have been the cause of conflict for centuries in Afghanistan (Johnson and Leslie 2004). In fact, "Afghanistan may be the only country in the world where during the last century kings and politicians have been made and undone by struggles relating to women's status" (Johnson and Leslie 2004: 1). Afghan women's history is much more complex than existing formulations of pre- and post-Taliban. Only a thorough and gender-sensitive analysis of history can reveal the extent to which women's rights have been and continue to be highly politicized.

⁴ For this study, the term "participants" is used to represent those who might be more commonly known as 'beneficiaries' of development programs. The designation "beneficiary" is passive and falls short, as it does not fully convey the depth and complexity of the relationship between actors.

It might appear to be beyond these purposes to elaborate on Afghan women's history. However, this history repeatedly demonstrates that revolutionary change, state-building, and women's rights operate hand-in-hand (Moghadam 1994). These lessons document the repeated ebb and flow in women's rights in Afghanistan, and the highly politicized nature of these fluctuations. Attempts at modernization have been made in several critical stages throughout modern Afghan history.⁵ Each time, these modernizations carried the *perception*⁶ that reforms were imported and artificially imposed. And each time these reforms were met with strong resistance, particularly the measures relating to women's rights.

In the 1880s, ruler Amir Abd al-Rahman Khan (and later his son Amir Habibullah) launched one of the earliest attempts at emancipation and social reform in the Muslim world. Women's emancipation thus began to play a prominent role in the nationalist ideology of modernization (Hans 2004). During the 1920s, King Amanullah sought to drastically transform gender relations by enforcing Western norms for women,⁷ which were in turn met with violent opposition and swiftly replaced by more conservative measures. King Nadir Shah's brief reign saw the closing of girls' schools and the revival of veiling and segregation. Similar attempts were made with rulers that followed, and these were further resisted. Each time social change was enforced, it was met with strong opposition from conservative forces. Despite incremental changes, women's rights vacillated between enforced modernization and conservative backlash. Afghan women once again found themselves at the center of a conflict between Western concepts of modernization and Afghan codes of culture, following the Saur (April) Revolution of 1978 and its program for social change (Hans 2004). Opposition to Soviet occupation-enforced reforms for women fueled the fundamentalist movement that took hold in refugee camps. This in turn served as the grounds for the *Mujaheddin* opposition to expel the Soviets and regain control both of women and Afghanistan.⁸

Despite these vacillations, the aid community and the Western media's attention only turned to Afghanistan – and Afghan women – as a result of the Taliban. The

⁵ This section on Afghan women's history has been adapted from Lina Abirafeh's previous report, see *Lessons from gender-focused international aid in post-conflict Afghanistan... learned?*

⁶ The emphasis is on 'perception' here, as it is crucial to understand how Afghans *perceived* the modernizations. This often has more sway over the people than the actual goal of the modernizations.

⁷ Amanullah was influenced and inspired by Western notions of modernity and progress. He sought to model Afghanistan after Western nations and saw the liberation of women as integral to this agenda. Examples of Amanullah's enforced emancipation include abolition of the veil and *purdah* (seclusion of women).

⁸ The *Mujaheddin* period is known for its violence towards women in the form of rapes, abductions, and restrictions on mobility.

Taliban's crimes against women are well known, yet Afghan women suffered under all the regimes in Afghanistan. In present-day Afghanistan, the country enjoys a democratically elected government and relative stability (mostly confined to Kabul). In this period of alleged liberation of Afghanistan – and of Afghan women – history repeats itself. Afghan women face another period of imported and imposed social change. However, as Afghan history has aptly demonstrated, a backlash inevitably follows.

AFGHAN WOMEN TODAY

Afghanistan aspires to become a state that is pluralistic, Islamic, prosperous, and peace-loving (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 2006). But the challenges are great. Afghanistan has some of the worst social indicators in the world, particularly for women. Afghan women have a life expectancy of 44 years. In their lifetime, they face staggering obstacles, such as the highest maternal mortality rate in the world and almost 90% illiteracy (Afghanistan National Human Development Report 2004). Many analysts and activists note that women remain oppressed in Afghanistan, despite the oft-cited rhetoric of liberation of Afghan women. It has been said repeatedly that women are not yet able to enjoy their human rights. "Discriminatory practices institutionalized prior to and during the war have not disappeared and in some ways have grown stronger. The insecure environment exacerbates this further" (Amnesty International 2005). Amnesty International elaborates that the violence suffered during the years of conflict under various regimes was an extreme manifestation of the discrimination and abuses they suffered before the conflict began, as well as the unequal power relations between Afghan men and women (Amnesty International 2005). Violence against women in Afghanistan must first be viewed as part of a larger landscape that has been shaped by Afghan history.

In a speech to the Ministry of Defense, Deputy Minister of Women's Affairs Mazari Safa explained that women still suffer from deprivation and oppression, even several years after the conflict has ended. She explained that women are still abused, prevented from accessing education and economic opportunities, and unable to participate in public life. Afghan women today are still battered in the home, harassed in public places, married off without their consent, and traded and exchanged to resolve disputes (Safa 2005). This belief is reinforced by the Report of the UN Secretary General on The Situation of Women and Girls in Afghanistan (2004) which states that "the volatile security situation and traditional social and cultural norms continue to limit women's and girls' role in public life and deny them the full enjoyment of their rights" (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2004).

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: DATA AND ASSUMPTIONS

The greatest challenge in doing research on violence against women is in accessing information. Available information in Afghanistan is based largely on anecdotal

evidence. Data is not yet widely available. In the few cases where figures are available, these may in fact under-estimate reality.

In Afghanistan, many refuse to acknowledge violence against women as an issue. In addition, women – and men – have different definitions of what constitutes violence. Violence against women in the context of intimacy is often not recognized and labeled as such. Domestic violence is viewed by women as being within the realm of normal gender relations and not assumed to be an abuse of women's human rights. In fact, Amnesty International reports a general perception among women that violence was to be expected in their lives (Amnesty International 2005). Women who recognize violence against them are still not likely to change or address it. Such women recognize the added challenge this presents to gender relations, which could in turn provoke additional violence.

Women may be reluctant to speak publicly about the violence they have feared, witnessed, or experienced for fear of being stigmatized. In addition, there is a perception that violence against women in the domestic sphere is a private affair that should be addressed within families and not revealed to outsiders. The concern is that such public admissions will bring shame to the family. Violence against women is often disguised and denied within the family to retain honor and standing within the community. It is difficult to measure rates of violence accurately, particularly when there is a social stigma attached.

In addition to the fear of social stigma and the blame they may receive, women are reluctant to report violence because existing institutions are not equipped to take action and protect them. Reporting the crime may place the woman at greater risk. The crime itself may not be recorded or classified as a crime by the institution. In Afghanistan, women's complaints are often disregarded. Amnesty International reports that "complaints from victims of domestic violence are widely dismissed by the police as a private matter and victims are often advised, and sometimes pressured into returning to their abusive spouses and family" (Amnesty International 2005). Thus, women run the risk of exposing themselves to additional violence from the community, the institutions, and the state.

There have been cases where reported statistics drastically increase in a given time. It is important not to make the assumption that rates of violence have necessarily increased. There might be other factors that contribute to the sudden change. Perhaps reporting procedures have become less arduous. Perhaps women are part of an organization or support group that is encouraging them to speak out. It is precisely these trends that make reporting on violence even more challenging. Statistics are unreliable, and quantitative data will be difficult to obtain. But this effort requires more than just figures and statistics. Structural issues need to be identified and addressed. Patterns of abuse and discrimination need to be revealed and studied. And root causes of violence in Afghan society must be understood.

The collection of information on violence is essential for overcoming silence and taboos that surround violence against women. Government statistics play an important role, but development and human rights organizations can accumulate

data – particularly of the qualitative nature – to be used to raise awareness and inspire action. In early 2006, UNIFEM began a nation-wide effort to collect data for a comprehensive database on violence against women in order to analyze trends, determine strategies for action, and provide response mechanisms and services (UNIFEM 2006).

Finally, it is worth briefly stating the obvious. Not all women are victims. Not all men are perpetrators. Not all women are inherently peaceful. And not all men are bellicose. It is important to recognize that not all violence against women is at the hands of men. There are various examples across cultures and histories to demonstrate that women have the capacity for violence against each other. This ranges from female genital cutting – where young girls are mutilated by the hands of older women – to the violence perpetrated on a new bride by her mother-in-law. While it is important to acknowledge such incidents, it is clear that in the majority of cases, women are primarily victims of violence perpetrated by men. In Afghanistan, new brides can face abuse from their female in-laws, particularly if the marriage is the result of *Bad* (giving a female relative to the victim's family to settle a crime) or *Badal* (giving a female relative in marriage in return for a bride). If the bride remains childless, violence can also result. The forms of such violence perpetrated by women often entail abuse of power and could lead to psychological and physical abuse.

FORMS AND PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE

There is a nascent understanding that particular forms of violence against women – particularly domestic violence – increase after a conflict. In Afghanistan today, it is not unusual to hear women say that they felt “safer” under the Taliban (Corrin 2004). Analyses of this phenomenon indicate that the continued availability of weapons, violence that male family members have experienced or meted out, trauma, frustration, and inability to access trainings and economic opportunities have contributed to the increase in domestic violence in recent years.⁹ Further, in conflict and post-conflict contexts, gender roles are changing and gender relations may be renegotiated as a result. The space created for women may bring resentment and backlash, driving violence further into the private domain.

Afghanistan's Millennium Development Goals Report for 2005 states that,

...violence against women is pervasive, a silent epidemic due to the low status of women, and compounded by long exposure to hostilities and conflict. It is a major obstacle to achieving gender equality and needs to be overcome through multiple efforts, including the rule of law, awareness creation, and gradually changing cul-

⁹ Afghanistan is not unique in this case. Most of the reports of increased violence against women in post-conflict context have emerged from Bosnia.

tural practices and mindsets. Above all it requires political commitment and leadership at the highest levels to take actions that will concretely improve the rights of women. (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 2005)

Violence against women is believed to be pervasive in Afghanistan, although little data exists to support this. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has called violence against women in Afghanistan a violation of human rights and an abuse that is sustained by a patriarchy that supports abuse and dehumanization of women. Violence against women also has significant economic and social costs, impairing women from actively and effectively participating in society and in their own – and ultimately Afghanistan's – development.

FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Violence against women in Afghanistan is widespread and ranges from deprivation of education to economic opportunities, through verbal and psychological violence, beatings, sexual violence and killings. Many acts of violence involve traditional practices including the betrothal of young girls in infancy, early marriage and crimes of "honor," where a female is punished for having offended custom, tradition or honor (Amnesty International 2005). Afghanistan's National Development Strategy – the government's overarching strategy for promoting growth, generating wealth and reducing poverty and vulnerability – also sees widespread inequalities for women. The Constitution of Afghanistan guarantees gender equality, however women lack legal awareness and many do not effectively enjoy the constitutionally guaranteed equal protection of the law. It also states that,

...violence against women is pervasive; it includes forced marriage, child marriage, trafficking, immolation and physical violence. Inheritance and property laws leave widows or divorced women vulnerable. Discriminatory provisions in laws and policies are still prevalent and have not been made consistent with the constitution. (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 2006)

According to Afghan tradition, females in the family are under the authority of the father or husband. They suffer restricted freedom of movement and nearly no control over the choices that govern their lives. Most women will not have the opportunity to assert economic and social independence, nor to enjoy their human rights. Girls are not given say over choice of husbands and find that they are abused and mistreated in the husband's home. Those who try to escape the abuse are stigmatized, isolated, and possibly imprisoned.

Forms of violence against women in Afghanistan include *Bad* and *Badal* (as previously mentioned), along with the practice of exchanging girls for cattle or material goods, and the recently well-publicized self-immolation, which entails women inflicting harm upon themselves to end their suffering. Amnesty International reports that the majority of self-immolation victims they interviewed had attempted to kill themselves as a result of violence in the family (Amnesty International 2005). This phenomenon has been studied and publicized in Herat and is prevalent all over

Afghanistan. In fact, the common perception that self-immolation occurs with greater frequency in Herat is simply because that is where most journalists chose to look.

Forced and underage marriages are also prevalent. Although there is Afghan legislation in place to prevent child marriages, it is not applied in practice, and girls are married off as early as age 8. Reports indicate that approximately 60-80% of all marriages are forced, and occur frequently as payment for debt or to settle a feud (Ministry of Women's Affairs 2005). According to Amnesty International, a child marriage is by definition a forced marriage, "as a child cannot be considered to have consented freely" (Amnesty International 2005). The selling and trafficking of women is increasing. New forms of violence are emerging as a result of women's increased visibility outside the home. Such violence is beyond social, ethnic, religious, tribal, or economic boundaries. Activists and experts have expressed concern that domestic violence is widespread, and there remains little public awareness, prevention, or response. Cases are not reported, and in the rare cases where they are reported, they are not properly recorded. The Ministry of Women's Affairs Legal Department recorded 583 reported cases in 2004, and it is likely that many more cases remain unreported (Ministry of Women's Affairs 2005). Violence against women and the absence of effective redress for victims, whether through informal or formal justice mechanisms, is a pervasive human rights problem in Afghanistan (Ministry of Women's Affairs 2005).

OTHER COUNTRIES AND CASES

Examples from other countries emerging from conflict seem to demonstrate that increased domestic violence forms an unfortunate component of the post-conflict agenda. "In virtually all post-conflict settings, [domestic violence] is acknowledged as a component of the "culture of violence" that ensues from war" (Ward 2002). The Secretary-General's report on women, peace and security states that domestic violence is one particular form that continues after the conflict.¹⁰ The experience of women in Bosnia is an oft-cited case to demonstrate the trend of increased violence against women in post-conflict contexts. Violence was inflicted upon Bosnian women at the hands of demobilized soldiers in the form of domestic violence. Similarly in Rwanda, women experienced increased violence following the conflict and became "soft" outlets for men's frustrations. Tanzanian women in refugee camps also were targets of various forms of violence.

Human Rights Watch reports that during the reconstruction process in post-conflict societies, violence against women is often ignored or relegated to low-priority status compared with other concerns (Human Rights Watch 1999). In these

¹⁰ See: UN S/2002/1154.

situations, cases of domestic violence have also largely gone unreported, and the figures available may be far lower than the actual prevalence of violence. In Kosovo, similar to Afghanistan, violence against women has only recently been made illegal, therefore certain types of violence can remain unrecognized or culturally accepted (Corrin 2004).

SPEAKING TO WOMEN AND MEN IN AFGHANISTAN

In 2005, the author published the first component of her dissertation research in the form of a report summarizing the outcomes of interviews with gender policy-makers and practitioners in Afghanistan. This report is a first step for the author in advancing this discussion and exploring the possible linkages between gender-focused aid and increased domestic violence. The outcome of this research should not be viewed as an argument against aid focused on women. It simply serves to advocate a contextualized approach to aid programming and the integration of men in gender programs.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

Interviews¹¹ conducted with 121 Afghan women and men reveal a discontentment with the operations of international organizations, and a sense that the social order has been disrupted in ways that have negative effects for women. Men recognize that they are not necessarily a focus of attention, and that the economic survival of the family depends on the woman as she is offered greater opportunities. Women have noted that men are increasingly becoming angry and impatient as they continue to be denied the traditional role of provider in the family, and as a result are becoming more violent at home. Of 121 interviews, over 30% mentioned violence as an increasing concern. Many others mentioned tension and increased sentiments of frustration or dissatisfaction.

A 20-year-old woman explained that “organizations provide opportunities only for women... so the women have to step out of the house in order for the family to survive.” A woman in her late 20s elaborated: “Women are allowed to work. Actually, there are *opportunities* for work. *Allowing* women to work is up to the husband. But if he cannot find work, he has no choice but to let his wife work.”

Almost all the men noted that women were prioritized in aid and development programs. Men expressed that they were offered very little; therefore they had no choice but to rely on their women to access training and economic opportunities,

¹¹ All quotations are taken directly from the author's personal research and interviews with Afghan men and women.

and to share them with the rest of the family. Men expressed concerns that international organizations were encouraging the women to speak out against their husbands and deliberately disrupting the household hierarchy. They also noted that they were promised dramatic life changes based on oft-cited rhetoric promising "liberation" and "empowerment," but none of this has materialized. Expectations were raised, and commitments were not delivered. Many men also felt that international organizations promoted change that was contrary to Islam. One man believed that international organizations are "unveiling our women." Another man explained that "in the area of importing or bringing foreign culture and tradition, international organizations have bad effect on Afghan women." A man in his late 20s from Kabul elaborated that "sometimes [international organizations] are pushing hard for change that is fast and big, and it is not sensible."

ARE MEN INCLUDED?

Women expressed concern that the lack of support for men has made men increasingly angry. Many women explained that they would prefer that their husbands were given equal opportunities to participate in development programs and elaborated that their lives would be easier as a result. Some women noted an increased gap between men and women, and many women mentioned increased levels of violence as outcomes of this frustration. One woman explained: "my husband says that they make men angry when they do nothing for them and only offer opportunities to women. He is a teacher, so he understands how people think about these things." Another woman elaborated that "men have become sensitive about women's organizations. They believe that these organizations train women to stand against the laws and their husbands. Of course, this is not true, but it is actually what men think." Another woman explained that men are becoming "more aggressive and angry to women because organizations do not give them any attention." And yet another woman reiterated the same point: "men are angry with international organizations because they only care about women. Men feel that they have dark futures." These statements reinforce the importance of *perception* over reality.

Many men expressed concern with the influence international organizations have had on Afghan culture. They felt that the organizations deliberately sought to enforce Western codes of culture as superior to Afghan ways. "Most men are not very satisfied with the organizations," a man explained. "They feel that these organizations are interfering in family issues." Another man felt that "organizations are creating distance between men and women by encouraging women negatively." "International organizations inspired foreign culture on our men. They represented Afghan men incorrectly. And also they brought down their role in the family and society, so it caused difficulties and violence between men and women," one man explained. Again, many men reiterated the notion that international organizations were stripping men of their rights and giving them to women. This belief reinforces

the view that the concept of rights is a zero sum game and that more rights for women leaves men without any rights at all.

POSSIBLE THEORIES AND RATIONALE

GENDER ROLES IN CONFLICT

Can women regain their pre-conflict rights – or perhaps acquire new rights – in post-conflict? Does conflict represent an opportunity to challenge the existing social framework, and does post-conflict present an occasion to restructure the status quo and reshape gender roles? Debate exists as to whether women gain in war through their increased access to traditionally-male spheres. Conflict compels individuals, households, and communities to fundamentally rethink and restructure their ways and beliefs. A part of this restructuring is played out in gender roles, and subsequently in gender relations.

Many theorists have argued that any expansion of women's roles in war is only temporary and fails to sustain itself when the war ends. Despite new roles, opportunities, and responsibilities, women may easily be marginalized in the reconstruction process. The fear that many women have of domestic violence often plays a key role in limiting their participation in development projects (Pickup, Williams, and Sweetman 2001). In fact, women are well aware that their active involvement in development projects may present challenges to men's roles. There may be tensions if women's newly-assumed roles are not viewed in line with traditional social structures. This backlash could return women to their pre-war roles, or perhaps leave women worse off than they were before the war. It is not unusual to witness a return to, or even an increase in, patriarchal control over women (Pickup, Williams, and Sweetman 2001).

AID PROGRAMMING AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

COULD DEVELOPMENT AID HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT?

Development, particularly in the aftermath of conflict, is often conflated with radical social change. However, development efforts generally do not set out to challenge gender power relations (Abirafeh 2005b). These efforts run the risk of doing a disservice to women by implementing programs and policies that have not taken all possible repercussions into account. Development interventions aiming to empower women may in fact place women at increased risk. This is particularly relevant in the case of Afghanistan, where the rhetoric used to justify development intervention stemmed from the language used to justify the ousting of the Taliban. And yet, nearly five years later, one could argue that Afghan women are neither "liberated" nor "empowered."

Interventions that raise expectations of empowerment encourage women to step outside pre-existing gender roles. In so doing, gender and power relations are challenged. Women face greater risk if the environment for social change is seen to be an external imposition. Amnesty International notes the "cautious and precarious atmosphere under which the issue of advancing women's rights is currently debated" (Amnesty International 2005). Women may suffer further when gender-focused interventions fail to take gender issues into account, focusing only on women. As seen from the research presented above, men's perceptions that they are neglected could result in a backlash for women. Social change and transformation are not simply introduced by development interventions, but are longer-term processes operating at a structural level to address gender inequalities - on women's own terms. Such processes are contextual and local, raising doubts as to whether an international aid-imposed social change agenda is really the right approach (Abirafeh 2005a).

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN AFGHANISTAN?

Afghan women felt that they were not sufficiently consulted on the direction and pace of social change. This demonstrates a denial of women's agency and of their ability to act on their own behalf and achieve gains. Theorists have elaborated on this point, arguing that in order to avoid a potentially violent backlash against women, development interventions must be designed in collaboration with the women. The process of engaging the women whom the interventions are serving generates empowerment (Pickup, Williams, and Sweetman 2001).

It is crucial to support and advocate a contextualized approach that recognizes Afghan history and Afghan pace and patterns of social change. To this end, interventions must aim to understand the concept of "gender" and "empowerment" in the local context and the construction of gender roles and relations. This entails congruence with Islam and other social frameworks within which Afghans choose to operate.

Development programs that do not take gender dimensions into account may be exacerbating violence against women. It is possible to emphasize women's centrality to post-conflict reconstruction and development programs without marginalizing men. Working with men in gender programming as participants and as advocates and supporters could help change male perceptions of women and help to overcome traditional practices which restrict women's rights. This is integral to combating violence against women (Amnesty International 2005).

Interventions should be cognizant of the images used and the resulting perceptions that emerge. The perception of an imposed Western agenda coupled with the

image of Afghan women as downtrodden creatures beneath *bourkas*¹² does little to advance the cause of Afghan women, particularly in the context of the Western world's current climate of fear/fascination with women in Islam. Women's rights activists advise caution in order to avoid backlash from the conservative elements of Afghan society. An Afghan woman explained that "when society is ready [for changes]... the women will ask [for] it by themselves" (Amnesty International 2005).

WHAT NEXT?

While the above presents theories and perspectives, the important lesson to draw from this is that well-intended efforts and interventions may in fact produce unexpected outcomes for women. Violence against women is not exclusive to Afghanistan, to developing countries, or to conflict and post-conflict countries. It is an epidemic that affects women worldwide and knows no social, cultural, or religious boundaries. It would do a great disservice to women in Afghanistan to isolate their suffering and label it an Afghan phenomenon. This research reveals that a more profound understanding of gender roles and relations in post-conflict contexts is needed. This entails further research into externalities of development interventions and work on men and masculinity as entry points.

IMAGES OF AFGHAN WOMEN AND MEN

It seems appropriate, in this context, to conclude with the voices of Afghan women and men. The author found that both women and men were concerned with the image the world had of them – an image that was largely used to justify intervention. The repeated themes included a concern that aid programs artificially separated women and men – even in cases where they wanted to work together to rebuild the country. Further, there is an overarching perception that aid programs seek to "change" what is Afghan culture. Both women and men were concerned that men were constructed as the enemy, and women were victims needing to be saved by those outside. An Afghan woman explained: "the world thinks that Afghan women need their help and they need to be saved from Afghan men." Afghan men elaborated that "most people in other countries believe that Afghan men are the ones who have taken the women's rights from them."

Both Afghan women and men noted that the *bourka* served as the image under which all others were determined. Afghan women repeatedly expressed exasperation with this facile construct, saying that the world thinks "Afghan women are only

¹² The *bourka* is a full-body form of covering traditionally worn by Pashtun women in Afghanistan to mark the symbolic segregation between men's and women's spheres. Amongst non-Afghans, it is more commonly known as *bourka*. However, *bourka* is the Arabic/Urdu term, while Afghans use the Dari/Persian term *chaddari*.

bourkas.” As a result of this image, the world felt compelled to “save them.” The theme of denied agency was also reiterated. An Afghan woman explained that the world thinks of them as oppressed and weak. This is not accurate, she said, “but the world wants to see us this way.” An Afghan man elaborated strongly that the international community wants Afghan men and women to have “freedom like the Western world. Western women wear clothes, not *bourka*. So Afghan women should wear that too; otherwise, they have no rights. This is a completely incorrect image. We don't approve of it. Afghan men and women are Muslims and have their own culture, and they do what is in their culture.”

An Afghan man stated that the world must have had a bad image of Afghanistan, or their freedoms would not be under foreign control. A woman elaborated: “I do not think the image was good. If it was good, we would not have so many foreigners coming to say they are helping us.” Despite this, many women are happy with the international community's support, but also felt that they would like to direct the changes. A young Afghan man explained it best: “The world thought they could bring freedom to Afghan women [but] freedom is only won from inside.”

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The first of these was the establishment of the United States Bank in 1791. This was the first national bank, and it was the first step towards the creation of a national currency. The bank was established by an act of Congress, and it was the first time that the federal government had taken such a step. The bank was to be a national bank, and it was to be the first step towards the creation of a national currency. The bank was established by an act of Congress, and it was the first time that the federal government had taken such a step.

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE SUDAN: OPENING PANDORA'S BOX

By Awad Mohamed Ahmed

ABSTRACT

This work was aimed at investigating the problem of domestic violence in the Sudanese family in regard to its extent, patterns and risk factors that determine its occurrence. The study population was recruited from the married women seen in the outpatient clinic of the Elribat University Hospital in Khartoum, Sudan during April 2006. Through a detailed questionnaire each eligible woman was asked to provide the following data: socio-demographic characteristics, if her husband abused her in any way in the last three months, the immediate circumstances used as an excuse for the violence, her reaction to the abuse, and if she had been hurt before marriage or during pregnancy. Of 254 women approached, 146 gave their consent to participate in the study, giving a response rate of 57.4%. Of these, 67 women were abused to give a prevalence rate of domestic violence of 45.8%. The non-abused women (79) served as the control group of the study. For the abused women, the average age was 25 ± 13 years, duration of marriage was 5 ± 3 years, and 52 of them (77.6%) were regarded as poor. The 67 abused women were subjected to 123 physically violent episodes in the previous three months, and most of them suffer usual and frequent controlling and threatening behaviors. Eight women (11.9%) reported violence during pregnancy. The immediate circumstances used as an excuse for the violence included suspicions of illicit relations, talking back, and inadequate home care. The common reactions reported by the abused women included staying quiet, 25 women (37.3%); crying, 19 women (28.3%) and resistance, 12 women (17.9%).

Domestic violence is a common problem in Sudanese society. Measures to address this problem, shared by health professionals and other concerned authorities, are discussed by the author.

PREFACE

Classically the Sudanese women suffer from many social problems such as poverty, illiteracy or inadequate education and female genital practices. Recently, with the relative increase in education of women and enhanced awareness to their basic human rights, the problem of violence to women comes to public attention. This is further augmented by the escalating reports on claimed cases of rape and other war crimes against women in areas of civil war in Darfur (in Western Sudan).

Domestic violence, the subject of this chapter, is no more than a set of learned, controlling behaviors and attitudes that are culturally supported. Various individuals and groups have defined domestic violence to include everything from saying unkind or demeaning words, to grabbing a person's arm, to hitting, kicking, choking, or murdering. It occurs in every racial, socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious group, although conditions such as poverty, drug or alcohol abuse, and mental illness increase its likelihood. Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. It both violates and impairs, or nullifies, the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. In marital relationships with domestic violence, the situation can sometimes be exacerbated by either partner having a known mental illness or a bad criminal record. Domestic violence, worldwide, once considered one of the most underreported crimes, became more widely recognized during the 1980s and 1990s. During this time, law enforcement and mental health professionals grappled with the severity, complexity, and prevalence of the problem. What is worse is that domestic violence has not yet been recognized as a serious public health problem, both by our medical and lay community. We as medical professionals feel that domestic violence is not a rare problem among our patients. With these issues in our minds, we decided to carry out an investigation of the occurrence and magnitude of domestic violence among a group of women attending an outpatient department of one of our hospitals.

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence is defined as "intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either resulted in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (World Health Organization 2000, 13). Violence is divided into three categories: self-directed violence, interpersonal violence and collective violence. The interpersonal violence is further divided into two subcategories: family or domestic violence (DV) and community violence (violence between individuals who may not know each other) (Morier-Genoud 2006). The violent acts can be physical, sexual or psychological or involve deprivation or neglect (World Health Organization 2000). In this chapter we are concerned only with DV.

Domestic violence is defined as violence exerted toward women by a family member (most commonly the husband or the intimate male partner) (Crowell and Burgess 1996). It can be seen as a pattern of psychological, economical and sexual coercion of one partner in an intimate relationship by the other that is punctuated by physical assaults or credible threats of bodily harm (Stark et al. 1981). Historically, DV is an old phenomenon. English sources from the pre-industrial era revealed six broad categories of social harms associated with abuse of alcohol (Warner 1997). The judiciary records of Portsmouth, UK, in the period 1690-1781 had included

356 cases of wife beating (Warner and Lunny 2003). DV most often refers to violence between married or cohabiting couples, although it sometimes refers to violence against other members of the household such as children or elderly relatives. Some studies indicate that the incidence of DV among homosexual couples is approximately equivalent to that found among heterosexual couples (Eisenstat 1999). DV carries serious consequences on the health and social well-being of the abused women. DV negatively affects the self-esteem of the victims rendering them vulnerable to sustainable physical and psychological disorders. In addition to physical injuries such as burns, fractures and wounds, the victims tend to frequently complain of unexplained chronic problems such as backaches and headaches (Taket et al. 2003). Psychologically, the abused women tended to have high rates of depression and had even made suicidal attempts. Reproductive health is not exempted from the harmful effects of DV such as miscarriage, unintended pregnancies, low birth weight and sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS (Taket et al. 2003). Women are not the sole victims of DV, as in many parts of the world approximately ten million children are exposed to some form of abuse during assaults on their mothers, either deliberately or accidentally (Nelson 1984). They may also suffer emotional traumas or behavioral problems, such as sleep disorders, enuresis and substance abuse, as a result of witnessing abuse (Nelson 1984).

There are three types of violence that occur in domestic settings: physical, sexual and psychological or emotional. The physical violence is the intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing harm, injury, disability or death e.g. hitting, shoving, biting, or use of a weapon. The sexual violence includes use of force to compel a person to engage in a sexual act or to attempt to complete a sex act involving a person who is unable to understand the nature or condition of the act. The psychological or emotional violence involves trauma to the victim caused by acts, threats of acts or coercive tactics. It can include humiliating the victim, controlling what the victim can do and cannot do, withholding information from a victim, deliberately doing something to make the victim embarrassed or diminished, isolating victims from friends and family, and denying victims' access to money or other basic resources.

Violence against women is a product of the intersection of factors at different levels, the individual, the family, the community and the society (Crowell and Burgess 1996). At the individual level, these factors include being abused as a child, witnessing violence at home, having an absent or rejecting father and frequent use of alcohol or drugs. At the family level, marital conflicts and dominant male control of wealth and family issues are considered to be strong predictors of abuse (Koss et al. 1994). At the community and society levels, the factors interplaying to produce violence include poverty, unemployment, lack of support, isolation of family and women, linkage of the concept of masculinity to male honor or dominance, acceptance of violence as a way to resolve conflicts, and social tolerance of physical punishment of women (Koss et al. 1994). Violence may evolve from socially

acceptable gender norms. In some families men are the masters of the house (or even women's owners!) because they provide financially. Women are expected to tend the house, mind the children, and show obedience to their husbands. A breach in the women's role or challenging the men's perceived rights may produce violence.

Domestic violence affects women in all social strata and ethnic groups in both developed and developing nations. Worldwide, 20-50% of women are affected by DV at some stage in their lives in most populations surveyed (Rodriguez 2001). In a United Kingdom (UK) study, 23% of women aged 16-50 years had been physically assaulted by a current or former partner, and two women were killed weekly (Taket et al. 2003). In the United States and Australia, 5-20% of women attending general practice settings reported experiencing DV in the year previous to the year of survey (Bradley et al. 2002). In a Canadian study performed in 1993 that involved 12,300 women, 29% reported that they had been subjected to DV (Weir 2000). They had been pushed, grabbed, shoved, slapped, hit with an object or had a gun or knife used against them by their partners. In California, DV causes one out of every three homicide deaths among women (Berrios and Grady 1991). In Islamic and African countries, the studies on DV have reported similar or higher figures for women's assaults. In Egypt, a prevalence of DV of 22% was reported and 2.5% of victims reported attempting suicide as a reaction to abuse (Vizcarra et al. 2004). In Turkey, a study among women attending a health center reported a prevalence of DV of 58%. The male partner was the primary abuser followed by mother and/or father (Alper et al. 2005). In Bangladesh, the prevalence of DV was found to be 40% in both rural and urban areas (Naved et al. 2006). DV was also found to be an important cause of maternal mortality in Bangladesh (McFarlane et al. 2006). DV in Bangladesh is particularly associated with dowry and other demands of marriage (Naved and Persson 2005). In Nigeria, the prevalence of DV was found to be 31% in a sample of 430 women (Fawole et al. 2005). The associated factors with DV identified by the Nigerian study included alcohol consumption and young age of the wife. In Uganda, a study among 5000 women reported a prevalence of DV of 30%, with alcohol consumption as the most common risk factor (Koenig et al. 2003). Other African studies on DV had reported incidences of 43% in Zimbabwe, 25% in South Africa, and 20% in Rwanda (Watt et al. 1998; Jewkes 2002; Van der Straten et al. 1998).

Sudan is located in the heart of Africa with a surface area of 2.5 million square kilometers (roughly 10% of the total landmass of Africa and 1% of the total earth surface area). It is populated by 35 million people of 19 ethnic groups and 600 subgroups, and more than 100 languages and dialects. The current Sudanese are, ethnically, a product of Hamites, Semites and Negroes following the Arab invasion of the Nubia Kingdom in the seventh century. Therefore, the Sudanese culture is diverse including African, Arabic, Islamic and Christian elements. In the Northern part (the site of our study), the Islamic religion plays a dominant role in people's lives. Orthodox Muslims believe that Islamic teachings should control every aspect

of their lives (great or small) including family matters. Sudan's women constitute 50% of the population. They are jeopardized by the highly drastic socioeconomic conditions currently affecting the country due to economic collapse and civil wars. The maternal mortality is one of the highest in the world (509 per 100,000 live births). The illiteracy rate among women is about 60% (40% among men). Around 90% of Sudanese women are prone to dangerous genital mutilations that seriously affect their reproductive health. In both the public and private sectors, Sudanese women suffer biased working conditions. The political participation for women is very limited with no significant impact on the national decision-making process.

Despite the deep history of DV and other types of violence against women, it has only recently become of public interest. The author has done two large studies on DV, one on patterns and determinants of DV among a group of women attending a health center in Sudan, and the other on the attitudes of doctors toward DV as a public health issue (Ahmed and Elmardi 2005; Ahmed et al. 2003). In the first study in 2003, out of 492 eligible women, 394 gave their consent to participate in the study, giving a response rate of 86.8% (Ahmed and Elmardi 2005). Of these, 164 women were abused, giving a prevalence rate of domestic violence of 41.6%. For the abused women, the average age was 29 ± 11 years, duration of marriage was 6 ± 4 years, 133 of them (81.1%) had an annual household income below \$2,500 dollars (poverty line), 122 women (74.4%) were unemployed and 74(45.1%) spent an educational period of 6-8 years in school. The abused women were subjected to 525 violent episodes in the last year, classified into controlling behaviors (194), threatening behaviors (169) and physical violence (162). Frequency of violent episodes varied from one episode for 41 women (25%) to more than 6 episodes for 34 women (20.7%). Twenty-seven women (16.5%) reported violence during pregnancy. More than a third of the abused group gave a history of abuse before marriage by their fathers, brothers, and other close male relatives. The immediate circumstances used as an excuse for the violence included suspicion of illicit relations, talking back, and inadequate home care. The common reactions reported by the abused women included staying quiet, 81 women (54.3%); crying, 32 women (19.5%) and resistance, 18 women (11%).

The other study on the response of doctors to DV involved 142 doctors who received the questionnaires; 102 of them returned it to give a response rate of 71.8% (Ahmed et al. 2003). The respondents' ages ranged from 25 to 54 years; 53 were female (51.9%); and 32 (31.3%) had experience dealing with DV in their practice over 10 years. Forty-three doctors (42.1%) had fair knowledge of the concept of domestic violence, 28 (27.4%) viewed it as a worthwhile health problem and 21 (20.5%) reported encountering 1-2 cases in the last year. Barriers to screening women for a possibility of being abused included lack of knowledge and training, insufficient time at clinics, and fear of problems with perpetrators. The female gender and long professional experience had positive correlations with better knowledge about domestic violence and the desire to intervene beyond physical treatment ($P < 0.005$).

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The aim of our study was to investigate the problem of domestic violence in the Sudan in regard to its occurrence, types and causes. The study was done at the outpatient department of Elribat University Hospital (EUH) in Khartoum. The EUH is the training center for the medical students of Elribat University, comprises 250 beds, and all major specialties along with most of the minor specialties. It runs both inpatient and 24-hour emergency services. We opted to use this place for our study as health settings are the best place for routine enquiries because they have the most frequent contact with the population. The study period was April 1-10, 2006. The subjects eligible for the study were all married women seen consecutively during the study period. Women who were too ill and needed to lie down to complete the questionnaire were excluded because they could not be interviewed in a private room as they needed continuous and close observation by a nurse or relative. The eligible women provided oral consent after the nature and procedures of the study were fully described to them. We avoided written consent so as to prevent a link identifying subjects to the questionnaires administered. We made it clear to the potential respondents that their participation in the study was totally voluntary, that they could quit at any phase of the study, and that their choice to participate would not affect the quality of their care in any way. We clearly explained to the participants that they would be asked sensitive questions about their relationship with their husbands and other family issues. The respondents were assured that any data obtained would be treated with strict confidentiality, and would be used solely for the purpose of research.

The next step in our study was that each eligible woman, after giving her consent to participate, was given an anonymous questionnaire in a private setting with strict confidentiality having been assured. Three research assistants helped the authors to recruit the women, and to answer any queries raised by the women in regard to completion of the questionnaire. Up until the present, there is no single universally agreed upon method of defining and measuring DV, but for the purposes of our study it was defined as an assault, threat, or intimidation made by the husband (Bacon et al. 2001). The abusive behaviors were categorized into threats, controlling behaviors and physical assaults. The physical assaults were further classified into minor (e.g. throwing objects, shoving), moderately severe (e.g. beatings, contusions) and severe (e.g. head and internal injuries). In the questionnaire we required the following information:

1. Age.
2. Employment.
3. Educational level.
4. Duration of marriage.

5. Wife's previous marriage.
6. Number of children.
7. Age of husband.
8. Consanguinity.
9. Husbands' occupation.
10. Husbands' educational level.
11. Husbands' previous marriage.
12. Husbands' current polygamy.
13. Overall socioeconomic status of the family; the average family in Sudan at the time of the study needed \$2,500 dollars per annum to meet the very basic requirements of living, families of income below this were considered poor.
14. Husbands' substance abuse habits: alcohol consumption, drug abuse.
15. Husbands' leisure time: e.g. at home, outside.
16. Overall rating of marital life: stable, in disharmony.
17. Couple living: alone, with a spouse's family.
18. If the woman, during the last three months was subjected to the following assaults by her husband: e.g. Hit, kicked, had an object thrown at her, slapped, pushed, injured with a weapon, shoved, punched her (body), punched her (face), forced to do something, attempted choking, burned, or physically hurt in some other way.
19. What were the immediate circumstances used as an excuse for the violence, e.g. suspicions of illicit relations, talking back, not obeying husband, not having food prepared on time, refusal of sex, failure to care for the home or children adequately, leaving the home without permission, questioning the husband about his money or illicit relations, others.
20. Reactions of wife to violence: e.g., staying quiet, crying, resistance, telling a relative, deciding to ask for divorce, contacting the police, others.

21. Controlling behaviors usually adopted by the husband: e.g. shouting at her, criticizing her in public, restricting her social life, checking her movements, keeping her short of money, others.
22. Threatening behaviors usually adopted by the husband: e.g. throwing things, threatening by a fist, threatening children, threatening with a weapon.
23. If she had sought medical help for husband's assaults and if her doctor ever asked her if she had been assaulted by her husband.
24. If she had ever been assaulted during pregnancy.
25. If she had ever been assaulted by other family members: e.g. father, mother, brother, son, husband's relatives.
26. If she had ever assaulted her husband in any way.

The questionnaire was piloted with 12 subjects in the same research setting for organization, clarity, and ease of completion. Questions on violence related to sexual issues were perceived to be offensive by the first ten women and then deleted from the survey. The data was analyzed using statistical software (SPSS version 11.5; SPSS, Chicago, IL). The analysis of the interval variables of the characteristics of both abused and non-abused women was done on frequency data using the Student's t-test. The significant levels were determined at $p < 0.005$.

RESULTS

We recruited 254 women as eligible for our study, and 146 of them gave their consent to participate, thus giving a response rate of 57.4%. Of the respondents, 67 women (45.8%) gave a history of one or more forms of abusive behavior committed against them by their husbands in the last three months. The rest, 79 women (54.2%), served as a control group for our study in regards to the socio-demographic characteristics of the study group.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the abused women and the controls (the non-abused group) are shown in **Table 1**. The abused group was significantly younger than the control group. The range of ages of the abused group was 16-53 years, whereas the range of the other group was 20-57 years. For the educational level, the abused group had a statistically significant lower educational status. The socioeconomic status, as determined by the annual income, determined that the majority of the families of abused women suffered poverty. The abused group had a shorter duration of marriage (the younger age of this group confirmed this finding).

Both groups had a somewhat similar rate of consanguinity. Only a small minority of both groups had a previous marriage. There was a statistically significant difference in the self-rating of their marital life, with more women of the abused group living in disharmony with their husbands. The non-abused group had a larger number of kids (this might be explained by their longer duration of marriage).

Table 1 - Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Abused and Non-Abused Control Group of Women			
Characteristics	Abused Women (n=67)	Non-Abused (control) Group (n=79)	p-value
Age (years)	25 ± 13	37 ± 11	$p < 0.005$
Educational level			$p < 0.005$
6-8 years	79 (48.2%)	39 (17%)	
8-12 years	74 (45.1%)	160 (69.6%)	
graduates	11 (6.7%)	31 (13.4%)	
Duration of marriage (years)	5±3	9±4	$p < 0.005$
Socioeconomic status			$p < 0.005$
Poor	52 (77.6%)	43 (54.4%)	
Fair to high	15 (22.4%)	36 (45.6%)	
Employment status			$p < 0.005$
Employed full-time	19 (28.3%)	37 (46.8%)	
Intermittently employed	8 (11.9%)	13 (16.4%)	
Unemployed	40 (59.8%)	29 (36.8%)	
Previous marriage	4 (6%)	9 (11.4%)	NS
Living with spouse's family	21 (31.1)	28 (35.9%)	NS
Self-rating marital life			$p < 0.005$
Stable	28 (41.7%)	59 (74.6%)	
Disharmony	39 (58.3%)	20 (25.4%)	
Number of kids			NS
0-2	42 (62.6%)	48 (60.7%)	
>2	25 (37.4%)	21 (39.3%)	
Consanguinity	23 (34.3%)	33 (41.7%)	NS

The socio-demographic characteristics of the husbands of both the abused and non-abused groups are shown in **Table 2**. The husbands of the abused group were younger than the other group, had less education, and a lower employment status. Only a minority of both groups had a previous marriage and only two of them were in current polygamy. The majority of the husbands from the abused group were consuming alcohol or using illegal drugs.

Table 2 - Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Husbands of the Abused Women and the Non-Abused Control Group

Characteristics	Abused Women (n=67)	Non-Abused Group (n=79)	p-value
Mean age (years)	37±8	40±6	NS
Educational level			$p < 0.005$
6-8 years	18 (26.8%)	11 (13.9 %)	
8-12 years	34 (50.8)	49 (62.1%)	
graduates	15 (22.4%)	19 (24.0%)	
Employment status			$p < 0.005$
Employed full-time	31 (46.3%)	62 (78.5%)	
Intermittently employed	22 (32.8%)	12 (15.2%)	
Unemployed	14 (20.4%)	5 (6.3%)	
Previous marriage	7 (10.4%)	9 (11.3%)	NS
Current polygamy	2 (2.9%)	2 (2.5%)	NS
Leisure time			NS
Mostly at home	43(64.2%)	38 (49.3%)	
Mostly outside home	24 (35.8%)	41 (50.7%)	
Alcohol or drug abuse	39 (58.2%)	14 (17.7%)	$p < 0.005$

*NS: Not significant.

Table 3 shows the patterns of controlling and threatening behaviors, and the distribution of the episodes of physical violence among the abused group for a period of three months prior to our study. The most common controlling behaviors were shouting, criticizing in public, and restricting their wives' social life and activities. The most common threatening behaviors were throwing things, threatening with a fist, and threatening their children. The abused women reported 123 episodes of physical violence (i.e. 1.8 per capita). The most common violent episodes were shoving and punching both their bodies and faces. The majority of these episodes were of mild to moderate severity. The immediate circumstances used as an excuse for the violence included suspicion of illicit relations, talking back, not obeying their husband, not having the food prepared on time, refusal of sex, failure to care for the home or children adequately, and going out of the home without permission. In a few of the violent episodes there were no evident reasons. The women who had injuries that required medical treatment did not mention the real cause of injury to their treating doctors. At the same time, none of their doctors had specifically asked them about the possibility of an assault by their husbands.

Apart from their husbands, 12 of the abused women (17.9%) mentioned other perpetrators, most commonly their fathers and brothers. Eight women (11.9%) reported different episodes of violence during their pregnancies, but no resulting complications were stated. The victims reported several reactions to the violent

behaviors including staying quiet (25 women, 37.3%), crying (19 women 28.3%), resistance (12 women, 17.9%), telling a relative (9 women, 13.5%), and contacting the police (2 women, 3.0%).

Table 3 - Patterns of Abusive Episodes Among 67 Women (some of them experienced more than one form of abuse)

A. Controlling Behaviors (usual patterns)	
➤	Shouting at her: 53/67 (79.1%)
➤	Criticizing her in public: 32/67 (47.8%)
➤	Restricting her social life: 21/67 (31.3%)
➤	Checking her movements: 14/67 (20.9%)
➤	Keeping her short of money: 13/67 (19.4%)
B. Threatening Behaviors (usual patterns)	
➤	Throwing things: 27/67 (40.2%)
➤	Threatening with a fist: 26/67 (38.8%)
➤	Threatening children: 19/67 (28.3%)
➤	Threatening with a weapon: 9/67 (13.4%)
C. Physical Violent Episodes (123)	
➤	Shoving her: 37/67 (30.1%)
➤	Punching her (body): 31/67 (25.2%)
➤	Punching her (face): 19/67 (15.4%)
➤	Kicking her on the floor: 9/67 (7.3%)
➤	Forcing her to do something: 8/67 (6.5%)
➤	Trying to choke her: 5/67 (4.1%)
➤	Others: 14/67 (11.4%)

DISCUSSION

PREVALENCE OF DV

This study confirms the sensitivity of the issue of domestic violence as evident from the relatively low response of recruited women (146 out of 254) to participate in our investigation. It is needless to mention that we informed the potential participants that questionnaires were to be completed in private rooms, that most of the research assistants were female, and that the collected data was to be treated with strict confidentiality. The response rate in this study is lower than in a similar study conducted by the same author in 2003 (Ahmed and Elmardi 2005). The difference between the two studies is that the women investigated in the 2003 study were familiar to the author, as he had been following up with them for chronic diseases for several years. We think that use of new communication methods such as telephones and e-mail may encourage more women to participate in such studies in the future.

The prevalence rate in our study (45.8%) is one of the highest in the world. It is nearly similar to studies done in African and Islamic countries (e.g. 40% in Bangladesh, 31% in Nigeria, 30% in Uganda) (Eisenstat 1999; Fawole et al. 2005; and Koenig et al. 2003). Our prevalence is also higher than in most Western studies, (e.g. 23% in UK) (Taket et al. 2003). Most of the Western studies were done in health settings in conditions similar to our study. It is useful here to remind the readers that our operational definition for DV encompassed, in addition to physical violence, both controlling and threatening behaviors. If the definition involved physical violence alone the prevalence would have been lower. There is a possibility of under-representation due to the cultural sensitivity of the issue, thus some people could not speak openly. The questionnaires, by their nature, depended on self-reporting, and were also subject to recall and reporting bias.

DYNAMICS AND PATTERNS OF DV

In this section we are concerned with discussion of types, frequency and reactions of victims to DV. All the possible spectrum of violent acts was reported as present in our study sample (from shouting and yelling to use of simple weapons such as sticks). But use of acts that result in severe injuries is rare in the Sudan. This might be because such acts usually result in severe injuries that necessitate intervention of other parties such as doctors or police. The usual pattern of assault is controlling or threatening behaviors with or without mild, or rarely, moderately severe injuries. Sudanese society, in general, is tolerant towards controlling behaviors by men. Even more, the lesser educated sectors of Sudanese society link the concept of manhood to control of their spouses, so therefore men restrict the social and professional roles of their families' women. The "natural history" of DV is that there is usually an initial phase of controlling behavior, and then, depending on the empowerment and/or reaction of the wife, it may or may not escalate to more severe abuse.

Domestic violence is never an event which occurs once in the life of a woman married to an abuser. It is a recurrent event (Ahmed and Elmardi 2005). In our study, physical assaults alone occurred at a rate of 1.8 per capita in a period of three months. The controlling and threatening behaviors were nearly "uncountable," so we referred to them in the section of results as "usual behaviors." The repetition of abusive acts is facilitated by DV occurring in an atmosphere dominated by controlling behaviors toward women. Also, as victims of DV, the women are readily available to their abusers since they live in the same space.

It is of utmost importance to discuss the possible reactions of the victims to DV (especially to implement support programs). In our study, the majority of abused women reacted in a passive and helpless way. They usually stayed quiet (fearing of stigma) or cried (even this was with a low voice not audible to neighbors). Unfortunately, some women may adopt the societal indifference to DV as being considered a private matter, or even a justifiable response to misbehavior on

the part of the wife (Sadowski et al. 2004). A study conducted in Bangladesh in 2001 indicates that the situation in the Sudan is similar to that among Bengali's, where 60% of the women were silent about their abuse (Vizcarra et al. 2004). The Bengali women preferred to continue in an abusive relationship, stating reasons such as high societal acceptance of DV, fear of stigma, financial dependence, fear of further abuse, and difficulty getting divorced as reasons for remaining in their marriages (Weir 2000). In the Uganda study conducted in 2003, it was found that the majority of women viewed beating as justifiable in some circumstances, thus posing a central challenge to preventing DV (Koenig et al. 2003). But in a few circumstances, the abused woman approached a source of help, especially when she could not endure any more, or when the violence became life-threatening (Gillum et al. 2006). Even in a Western country like Canada, where women are more aware of their rights, victims rarely report abuse to the police except when a weapon is used, or if they fear for their lives (Weir 2000). A question may arise, why do victims remain in such abusive relationships? There are two possible reasons. Some women, due to their low educational and employment status, can only obtain marginal (and low-income), or illegal jobs. Divorce seems to be, theoretically, a definitive solution to put an end to family assaults. Due to the *fiqh* (man-made laws based upon divine Islamic laws), the decision to divorce is almost exclusively reserved for the husband. Only under certain conditions can the woman file a case for divorce in Sudanese court (where she has to follow bothersome and prolonged court procedures that might take several years). Some women refuse the option of divorce considering it to be a social stigma, or because they do not want their children to suffer when they lose the financial support of their fathers, or because they hope that their husbands will change for the better (Fawole et al. 2005).

Some of our study sample reported that they had been abused by family members other than their husbands. They specifically named their fathers, brothers, and even some of the close relatives of their husbands. Similarly, in an Indian study, 7% of DV victims had been assaulted by multiple perpetrators (Chhabra 2005). These included the father, brother, or other close relatives. Matters are complicated when some societies view some acts such as beating or verbal abuse as not violent when committed by a father or a brother.

In rare instances, there are reports of men being abused by their wives (Taket et al. 2003). Even more, DV can be a problem in same sex relationships (Eisenstat 1999). No one from our sample admitted that they ever abused their husbands, either verbally or physically. We know that this pattern of abuse rarely occurs in Sudanese society (Ahmed et al. 2003). In a UK study, one in seven men reported being physically assaulted by their wives (Taket et al. 2003). Even in African societies, there are reports of men being abused. In Uganda, 18% of surveyed women reported verbally or physically abusing their current male partners (Koenig et al. 2003). However, such incidents are less serious than those reported by women.

CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING AND RISK FACTORS OF DV

Our study indicates a clear association between DV and certain socio-demographic and personal characteristics, such as poverty, young age, low education, and a lesser likelihood of employment for the wife, and alcohol or drug abuse for the husband. While researching different studies on DV, we found a long list of other causes and immediate circumstances used as an excuse for the domestic violence. Examples included patriarchal family structure, differences in ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds of the spouses, pregnancy, suspecting immoral behavior, disobedience, talking back, witnessing DV in childhood, sexual impotence, jealousy, refusal of sex, use of contraceptives without permission, neglecting the house or children, differences in approaches to child upbringing, and arguments over money.

Socio-Cultural Contexts

Numerous studies have indicated that the possible determinants of DV are salient across diverse cultural and societal contexts (Bates et al. 2004). In this section, we will discuss the impact of three factors on DV, the societal perception of violence, the institution of marriage, and religion.

The societal perception of violence is primarily a function of knowledge received, and the socio-cultural and economic environment in which the violence takes place. Violence is understood by many people as limited to actions that cause physical traces on the body, and does not include psychological and social impacts. Thus, practices such as polygamy or restricting women's movements are not considered to be violent! In many societies, the current socioeconomic power relationships virtually render the woman as the property of a male. This "ownership of women" predisposes them to abuse by linking masculinity to male honor, and the acceptance of violence in regards to female chastity in order to resolve conflicts. These norms are not peculiar to Sudan and may prevail in many cultures worldwide (Heise 1998; Orpinas 1999). Thus, DV occurs in an atmosphere that favors violence against women in the society at large (at work, on the street, etc).

The issue of DV is also closely related to the institution of marriage. Marriage is an important site for the expression of perceived gender roles and relationships (Alkhateeb 1999). Some Muslim husbands socialize their wives to believe that whatever he wants the family to do is the same as what God wants them to do. He, in effect, makes himself something of a god (Alkhateeb 1999). Men often use violence to enforce their dominating gender roles, particularly in the early years of marriage (Bates et al. 2004). At the time of marriage, young women know little to nothing about sex and the aspects of housekeeping. At that point, abusive men often use DV to establish new norms for their future partner, who is then rendered powerless and vulnerable to abuse. The lack of understanding of some men regarding the requirements of an Islamic marriage may further aggravate family violence.

Islamically, the husband provides the *mahr* (dowry), which is an amount of money or property intended to provide the wife-to-be with some economic security. Unfortunately, some men may understand this (dowry) to be as though they are buying a slave, thus paving the road to violence, and the wife's subordination. A relevant issue is divorce. In Sudanese society, divorce (or even being unmarried) is socially unacceptable, especially when the divorce is asked for by the wife. As we discussed above, divorce on the will of the wife is difficult to obtain. In addition, divorcees suffer social isolation or even further violence from other members of the family (as she is culturally not allowed to live independently in a separate home).

Religion plays an important role in the life of the Sudanese, where Islam is the religion of the majority. Many Muslims believe that Islamic teachings should control all aspects of their lives, and in the foremost, the family issues. Some Muslims believe that Islam favors male supremacy and requires total obedience from a woman (a wife, a sister, a daughter) to the desires and orders of the men of the family. They use selective excerpts from the Qur'an (the holy book of Muslims) to prove that men who beat their wives are following God's commands (Sadowski et al. 2004). Even more, some fundamentalist Muslims (as in all religions) believe that women are the source of all the sins in the world, which paves the way towards violence against women. However, some enlightened religious men are trying to provide innovative and fair readings of the Qur'an so as to indicate that wife abuse is a result of culture rather than religion (Sadowski et al. 2004).

Poverty and Empowerment

Although women from all socio-economic groups suffer from DV, many studies provide some evidence that women from poor families disproportionately experience violence (Malcoe et al. 2004). Poverty increases vulnerability to violence by increasing relationship conflicts. Being associated with reduced educational and economic power, it reduces the ability of men to live in a manner they regard as successful (Jewkes 2002). Losing the role of financial provider for their family generates more tension in the domestic atmosphere. Some men, having lost their sense of power and control, vent their frustrations about poverty and their inability to fulfill their role as provider by battering their wives. Some studies have suggested that battered women may remain in abusive relationships because of financial dependence (Carrillo 1992). There may be other causes for their position. In a study performed by the author we found some women were not dependant financially on their abusers, but they were reluctant to leave such a relationship because of psychological dependence and fear of further injuries, the stigma of divorce and the potential failure of obtaining it (Ahmad and Elmardi 2005).

There are variable views on the effects of economic empowerment on the women's possibilities of being abused. In Bangladesh, a study suggested that women participating in a micro-credit program, on virtue of being given a more public and social role, were protected to some extent against DV (Jewkes 2002). Thus, economic empowerment can be seen as entailing a departure from the traditional gender

norms mandating women's seclusion (Bates et al. 2004). At the same time, some researchers had suggested that women's increased bargaining power might threaten the men's inherent sense of control and superiority (Hoffman et al. 1994). To detail, the new role of women as financial providers, especially in a context of deprivation, may undermine men's perceived right to authority, power, and control, and increase the risk of violence (Bates et al. 2004). Some studies indicated that the protective role of women's high social status, as measured by education and the degree of autonomy or control over resources, may be context-specific and that such women in conservative societies may actually be at an increased risk of violence (Koenig et al. 2003). One study suggested that these empowered women are only vulnerable to violence in the near future, but that they become protected after a critical threshold of empowerment has been reached and the gender role, then, has substantially shifted (Bates et al. 2004).

Education

Our study clearly indicates an association between women's educational level and their vulnerability to abuse. Similarly, a Turkish study indicated that DV is significantly associated with low educational level, with illiterate and semi-illiterate women reporting marital abuse 2.6 times more than the educated ones (Ergin et al. 2005). The low level of education is linked to unemployment and poor income (Kyriacou et al. 1999). The poor education may be an indicator of poor communication skills, which have been linked to domestic violence (especially in a context of a high gap of education between the couple) (Dutton and Strachan 1987).

Employment

Unemployment (recent or long-term) and the stress of finding work increase the risk of a man physically abusing his wife (Kyriacou et al. 1999). Employment in itself does not protect couples from marital violence. Stressful work experiences have also been associated with violence (Barling and Rosenbaum 1986). Professional rivalry may generate marital tension. In a conservative society like the Sudan, the work of the wives, the unemployment of the husbands, and the husbands' perceived loss of power and control breaches the latter's cultural role as the family supporter, which then generates family conflict.

Alcohol

More than half of the husbands of abused women consume alcohol or abuse some drugs, mostly cannabis. Some studies indicated that 25-50% of perpetrators of DV were drinking during the event, and that a history of problem drinking was obtained in 60-70% of them (Bell et al. 2004). It was also found that half of the binge drinkers were drinking before an episode of violence, and that they are three times more likely to abuse their wives than abstainers. In particular, the victims of DV in many African studies had reported that alcohol was the most common cause (Fawole et al. 2005; Koenig et al. 2003). Some studies have investigated the exact

role of alcohol in DV, showing that alcohol may aggravate marital difficulties leading to separation and divorce (Bell et al. 2004). Some studies have suggested that structural factors such as unemployment disrupt communities and social relationships leading to alcohol consumption (Lin et al. 1997). In some instances, there is a combination of alcohol consumption and drug abuse, adding greater risks to family violence.

Pregnancy

In comparison with international studies, only a few of our respondents reported assaults during pregnancy. This might be due to the fact that a pregnant lady in Sudan is used to being cared for by her mother or elder sister, so her contact with her husband is reduced. Pregnant women are thought to be twice as likely to experience physical violence. In the UK, 12% of maternal deaths reported DV during their pregnancy (Bates et al. 2004). Up to 41% of antenatal attendees in American studies report a history of violence at some point in their past pregnancies (Mezey and Bewley 1997). Pregnancy by virtue of its hormonal and psychological changes may trigger violent assaults by minor events used as an excuse for violence, such as sex refusal or inadequate home care, or even forgetting to sew a missing button onto a husband's shirt. Violence during pregnancy is a health and social problem that poses particular risks to women and their embryos. It has been associated with increased risks of abortion, preterm labor and low birth weight.

CONCLUSIONS

Our study indicates that domestic violence is a serious and common problem in Sudanese society. A prevalence of 45.8% puts Sudan as one of the countries of high prevalence. As in other countries, DV is associated with some socio-demographic and negative personal behaviors on the part of the male partner. The subordinate status of women, worldwide, resulting from long-acting cultural and socioeconomic factors renders them easy victims for violence.

The roots of DV can be traced to culture and religious interpretation which sustain and stereotype gender relationships that favor male supremacy and the subordination of women. Women themselves are less aware of their human rights. Even more, as we discussed above, some African women agreed that men are justified in beating their wives. There is a lack of clear policy that directs the efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations to alleviate women's abuse. The Sudanese government did not yet ratify the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was adopted by the United Nation's General Assembly in 1993. Currently, there are no laws to punish the perpetrators of DV in Sudan. Likewise, there are no available supportive services for the victims, even in the form of counseling or legal assistance. What are available are infrequent and ill-prepared seminars and workshops performed by a few organizations of the civil society that only produce unproductive recommendations. Lack of

information, financial deficits and lack of skills for intervention are responsible for this situation.

There is a need to implement a national multidisciplinary program to deal with this problem, with the collaboration of health workers, non-governmental organizations, governmental departments of health and social care, universities and other concerned bodies. This program should aim at augmenting the professional, public, and government awareness towards the problem, and to provide medical service, social support, protection and legal assistance to the abused victims. We should be aware that unless evidence of a benefit exists, many women might hesitate to cooperate with the programs addressing domestic violence.

On our part, the health system should wake up to the idea that DV is more than a private matter, and health professionals should get involved in it. It is important to educate and train clinicians and health workers in promoting disclosure of abuse. This can be accomplished through development of knowledge and skills of identifying and treating DV victims, and to emphasize the associated cultural, ethical and legal considerations. For emergencies, comprehensive guidelines for identification and medical management of the abused women should be issued. Although the doctors alone cannot change the cultural and social norms that may give rise to violence, they have much to offer beyond the physical treatment of injuries. They must be aware of the societal (and professional) misconceptions that lead to, or aggravate violence, and correct them. Doctors should acknowledge the injustice of violence and give a clear message to the abusers, victims and community that battering is a public health problem, and not at all a private matter. Some reform in the curricula of medical schools is needed to introduce specific DV courses to impart knowledge and to develop awareness and intervention abilities in future doctors.

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THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON

The history of the city of Boston is a subject of great interest and importance. It is a city of many centuries, and its history is full of interesting events. The city was founded in 1630, and since that time it has grown into one of the largest and most important cities in the United States. Its history is full of interesting events, and its people have played a great part in the history of the country. The city has been the seat of many important events, and its people have been the leaders in many of the great movements of the world. The city has been the birthplace of many of the great men of the world, and its people have been the leaders in many of the great movements of the world. The city has been the seat of many important events, and its people have been the leaders in many of the great movements of the world. The city has been the birthplace of many of the great men of the world, and its people have been the leaders in many of the great movements of the world.

PART III: SURVIVOR STORIES



MY STORY

By Siraha Kalam¹

The beginning of my story may be a familiar one for children of divorce. I was a teenager, living with a step-mother who made my life miserable, and a father who tried not to notice that his little girl was struggling with the angst of adolescence, compounded by an unwelcoming home life. I had usually done well in school, but as my home became increasingly turbulent, my grades reflected the instability of my life.

I moved out of the house at age 16, and in with an older friend, but still carried all of the insecurities of feeling abandoned by my mother at age 11, and the routine of being told I was worthless, lazy, and bad, by my step mother. For years I thought that if I could just be out of my dark home, I would be happy. My dreams didn't go much beyond the moment of knowing I did not have to go back to my house anymore. That left me lost after my dream was realized. I was a failure at school. I felt lonely. I did not have high expectations for myself. I tried to make it, but did not have a clear understanding of what exactly that meant.

Fortunately, the one constant in my life was religion. I prayed, wore *hijab* (head covering), never really had a boyfriend, and tried to connect with community by being involved in mosques and youth groups. I had wanted to go to college, but deep inside doubted that I could be successful at it. I registered at a university, but instead of beginning classes, I went to Palestine; my father's homeland, for the first visit I had made since I was 12-years-old. A month after my 19th birthday, after only one month in Palestine, I agreed to marry.

It may seem odd to begin the story about my experience with domestic violence with information about my adolescence, but I feel that my surrounding support system, self-image, and life experience all contributed to me marrying while still a teenager, marrying someone I did not really know, and forming an unhealthy relationship.

In my marriage, though I rarely witnessed what I would have identified as violence, at the time, I believed that relationships routinely involved name-calling, yelling, intimidation, and strife. Getting caught up in those habits lead to the night when my husband of one year became enraged when I questioned him about going to a party where there would be alcohol, and leaving me home alone all night. He yelled at me and called me names, and that was manageable, but then he pushed me

¹ A pseudonym has been used for privacy purposes.

on the floor, and kicked me so hard with his steel toe boots that I just tried to curl up in a ball to protect myself. I laid on the floor in tears as he stepped over me and left to the party that he stayed at all night. When he came home, I was covered in the darkest purple bruises all over my otherwise alabaster white skin. He had no shame, and was actually excited to see the marks his abuse had left on my flesh. He told me that now maybe I would learn not to ask him where he was going.

That was the first time I realized that I was one of “those women” I never thought I would be. It took several other incidents of physical abuse, threats that he would kill himself and “not go alone,” insult upon insult, a pregnancy and baby, countless prayers, visits to marriage counselors and imams, and eight years of my life before I finally filed for a protective order, and ultimately divorce. Now that I have reached age thirty, I look back and am glad that I ended my relationship with a clear mind and pure heart. I remember making *duaa*’ (supplication) constantly to ask God to give me patience, until one day I realized that my *duaa*’ was answered long ago, and I had too much patience. At that moment, I stopped praying for patience, and began asking for resolution.

I now have resolution and peace in a way I never knew. Although when I left my marriage I was convinced that I never wanted to be in a relationship again, I soon came across a man who not only accepted my past, but admired it. I went back to school and have received awards for public service and academic achievement. I have found strength in working with other Muslim women who are coming to terms with abuse as I did. The secret I once tried to hide no longer leaves me in darkness. I am no longer a victim; I am now a survivor, and I am not ashamed to say that I am a woman, just like millions of others in the United States, who experienced domestic violence – but have overcome it.

TOASTED CHEESE SANDWICHES

By Suzan Williams¹

My father loved my siblings and me very much. He taught me more about life than most people learn in a lifetime, but, as a child, I did not know that love came without fear and anxiety.

I grew up with a father who was an alcoholic and a controlling figure as head of the house. He had a temper even when he was not drinking, and he was physically and mentally abusive to my older sisters. I was afraid as a child. I would hide in my covers some nights listening to the yelling and hitting, praying for it to end.

My father only hit me twice. The first time I was around seven or eight. We were driving a long distance in the car, and we stopped for fast food, which was a rarity for my health-conscious family. My dad had been driving all night and all morning, so he was tired. He asked me what I wanted a couple of times, but I had been sleeping in the car so I could not get myself focused enough to read the menu or to answer him. He was two feet away from me, so when he smacked my head I moved about two more feet sideways. The entire restaurant stopped eating and stared at me. I was frozen. My father ordered for me, and then we had to sit in the restaurant while everyone was privy to our secret, that abuse was real in our family.

It was a big family secret. Yes, everyone knew my dad had a temper, but the real truth was hidden from view. We moved a great deal while I was a child, which was one way the secret was kept so well.

The second time he hit me I was nine or ten. I accidentally stayed out after dark because I got lost coming home. My mom told my dad. He spanked me with a belt on my behind the next day. I knew my mom could not protect me because she did not protect my sisters or herself from his abuse. After that incident, I realized my childhood had ended. I relinquished the idea that I could hide behind my mother and not be seen. I was now in clear view.

Not long after the second incident, we moved to a city in the western part of the country. My father did not like his new job, and after a year he quit. He then traveled outside the city looking for a better opportunity while we remained in the city. He eventually found a job and moved seven hours south from us. We were supposed to follow him after the school year ended, but we never did.

At the end of the school year, he announced to my mother that he was "finding himself," and that they needed time apart. Four years later, they divorced. My

¹ A pseudonym has been used for privacy purposes.

mother had been very co-dependent on my father and was forced into the divorce. She began attending a program for displaced homemakers.

I was so happy that I would not grow up the way my sisters had, with beatings and anxiety over every move I made. Instead, in the years of my childhood to follow, I grew up seeing my father during the times when he could behave like a real dad. I enjoyed our time together for the most part.

My mother, on the other hand, was also "finding herself," and I had to bear the brunt of it. You could say that I raised myself. I had a car, a job, and a checking account by the time I was sixteen. With my sisters grown up and moved out, I felt I had no one, and I was lonely.

During my high school years, I developed a good relationship with my ball coach's wife. He and his wife saw my life as others did not. With my mother's approval, they invited me to live with them throughout my last year of high school. Living with them was a wonderful experience. I got to see how a functional family structure interacted. I felt respect, warmth without anxiety, and a sense of home. I realized that there was greener grass than the experience I had living with my own family, and it was up to me to choose which side of the fence I wanted to live on.

I always had a great sense of my Creator and attended church regularly during this time in my life. I was so proud of myself when I raised my high school grades enough to get into college and managed to get a job on campus my first year. While in college, I lived in the dormitory in the beginning, and found out that everyone has problems, rich and poor. I had dated someone for a while since high school, but was unhappy with the relationship and the direction it was taking my life. Eventually, I decided to dump my long-time loser boyfriend. It was a particularly rough time for me psychologically and spiritually. I decided to go to counseling after realizing that my feelings of depression were not normal. I prayed to God to lead my life, to give me direction, and to do His will.

I learned about Islam one month later from a friend of my father's who was Muslim. We met at a family dinner where I asked him about his religion, and he gave me a brochure entitled *Muhammad in the Bible* by Jamal Badawi to read. At that time, I did not learn enough about Islam to realize the extent of its meaning, but two months later, God gave me another opportunity to listen. This same friend asked me if I had read the brochure he gave me, and I started asking questions. This led to nine months of studying and internalization of Islamic principle and beliefs before I openly declared myself a Muslim. Islam is the completed message from Allah (the word for God in Arabic), and I was awakened to the message of the Qur'an (the Muslim holy book). I was renewed. Religion had been part of my family life as a child, and I had always been a God-conscious individual. So Islam became an extension of my spirituality.

I worked hard through college to transform my life and learn the skills my parents were unable to give me, like open communication without anger and peaceful understanding when things don't go as expected. But I was still working on other skills, like being able to stand up for myself in a healthy way, and learning how to

say no in a nice way. I had to work two jobs at times and take summer classes to finish my studies on time to graduate.

After I finished college, my Muslim friends started asking me whether I was interested in marriage. At that time I was not interested, and I was planning to move to the Midwest where I had found a great job opportunity. My friends insisted that I meet someone they had met a few months ago when he came to town. I told them I was not interested in marrying at this time, but they insisted it was a good match, so I asked for him to write a letter addressing why he wanted to get married and his vision for his life. After reading the letter I agreed to meet with him for the first time. I met him, and I did not like him. He was polite, well-mannered, and well-dressed, but I did not feel an attraction to him in any way. I was anxious, and didn't want to hurt his feelings or my friends, so I remained quiet. The host said, "In Islam, if you don't say anything that means yes." He agreed that he wanted to marry me. That was it. As far as they were concerned, we were getting married. I protested privately, suggesting that I move first then correspond with him to get to know him first. They convinced me that the marriage was a great opportunity I would miss out on, and that in Islam it is forbidden to spend time together before marriage.²

I took my fiancée to my father's home to meet part of my family, secretly hoping that my father would disapprove and that would be that (if I could not protect myself then my Dad might this time). However, when he excused himself for a moment, my father said, "I like him and I think you should marry him, but if it doesn't work out then don't come back to me."

I chose not to look at the red flags that were waving over me and deep down in my gut saying, "danger, danger." We were married a month later. I was unhappy after the first two weeks. We moved to the city of my great job opportunity, which was a three-day drive from my family. I felt I had no one to help me, and no where to go. I felt trapped.

During the first year, I was disgusted and upset most of the time. Our personalities were very different, and we approached almost everything in different ways. I kept it to myself, thinking that I needed to be patient during the first year to give the marriage a chance. One morning, while I was rushing to get ready for work, I found we had run out of clean spoons, so I used a butter knife to stir sugar into his tea. He came out of the bathroom and was appalled at my action. He yelled at me and even tried to reprimand me for my bad behavior by making me apologize and promise

² Editor's Note: Islam prohibits an unmarried man and woman who are not closely related (sibling, parent, aunt/uncle, grandparent) to be alone together. Potential marriage partners may spend time getting to know each other in the presence of a chaperone or in public settings until they are ready to make a commitment for marriage.

that I would never do it again. I was not a quiet, sit back and take it kind of wife, so we began to fight regularly. After a fight, he would say he was sorry and want to give me a small gift or take me out to dinner, but first, I would have to realize that what I did was wrong, and agree never to do it again.

My first child was born two years into the marriage. I was generally happy about the event. Right after the delivery, while I was still on the table, my husband said, "How wonderful, let's start planning for the next one." If I could have, I would have jumped up and strangled him for his insensitivity to the pains of labor I had just endured!

It was also during this time that I began suspecting my husband of drug abuse. The first clue I had was immediately after my first son was born when he wanted me to fill the Codeine prescription the doctor had given me for the pain. I did not want to take the Codeine because Tylenol was doing the trick, but he filled it anyway. A few weeks later I found an empty bottle. Later, he kept getting prescriptions for some sort of liquid medicine for pain, eventually followed by large bottles of pain pills. He seemed to have an excuse for all of it though, and when I approached him on the subject, he would get angry and leave the room.

When our son was one month old, my husband's parents came to visit. It was the first time I had ever met them, and they stayed for one and a half months. I liked them because they kept my husband calm. One morning after breakfast, while they were visiting, I cleaned up the kitchen and went upstairs to change the baby for our day out. I suddenly heard my husband scream for me! I came running down the stairs to find him shouting at me for not warning him that the stove was still hot. While conversing with his mother, he had leaned back onto the stove and burnt his hand. He told me to go to my room as punishment. I was so embarrassed at being treated that way in front of his mother that I started crying in front of her. She reprimanded him for his behavior, and he apologized, but I still had to say that I was sorry, and that I would never allow such an incident to happen again.

The next three years were filled with fighting, pushing, hitting and lots of manipulative games, mostly in the privacy of our home. You see, it did not happen all at once. It was a build-up of physical and psychological games. I was a strong, independent, educated woman, but he was treating me as though I were a child, who did not have a mind of my own to know the difference between right and wrong. Friends started to notice how dysfunctional our relationship was and would question me, but as I had been trained to do as a child, I kept the abuse a secret. I was embarrassed and depressed. People would ask me how I had gotten a bruise on my arm or leg, or why I was limping, and I would lie. He went out of town for a week on business, and the day he was to return I hyperventilated at work a half an hour before I was scheduled to go home. I had no idea what was happening to me physically. I started getting sick each day fifteen minutes before I was scheduled to go home; I would get an upset stomach and a headache.

One of the ways my husband abused me was by controlling my time and space. If I was sleeping at night and he wanted me to cook for him, usually a full meal, he

would wake me up and try to force me to stay awake to cook. When I refused, he would throw things at me like pillows and hair brushes while I was still in bed. Then he would broil steak and smoke up the whole house, leaving my door open to keep me awake with the smell. He would also turn up the volume on the television loudly while playing a movie or listening to music. I became isolated from my community and friends. I would have to beg for permission to go to the sister's *halaga* (discussion group) at the *masjid* (mosque), which was less than a mile from my home. If the *halaga* lasted longer than usual, and I came home later than he expected, he would start in on me with questioning what I was doing, who was there, and what time everyone else left. Then I would have to apologize and promise never to do it again. If I got upset, he would start hitting me or pushing and pulling me.

One time my son did not want to go to the team game that he had signed up for. His dad and I disagreed about his choice. I said he had to be responsible and follow through with his commitment to join the team. His dad said he did not have to go. That was the straw that broke the camel's back for me. I got so frustrated at the constant undermining of my body and soul that I got a pair of scissors and cut my sons sports pants and shirt in front of my husband and my son. He sat there holding the boy and saying "It's okay, Mommy is crazy. I'll protect you." He made me crazy. I was normal, and he, through his manipulation and control, made me go crazy. What was crazier is that I let it happen.

My sister had moved two hours from where I was living. At times when I could get away after he beat me, or the fight escalated so badly that I was afraid he would hit me, I would go to my sister's home. He did not dare show up with my brother-in-law there, but he would call me at her home with promises to be kind and that we could work out our issues. What issues? He was a demanding, unrealistic, manipulative selfish pig who expected the whole world to revolve around him. He would find any excuse to be mean to me. I would yell back when I got frustrated enough, then he would feel justified to beat me because I was talking back, and was being a bad wife who needed to know my place and be controlled.

One time, his friend from college was visiting our home for the first time. He asked me to prepare a full meal, and we planned the visit together. We agreed to a dinner time, and he took his friend for a tour of the city while I stayed home and prepared dinner. By the time they arrived home, all of the food was warming in the oven, except for one dish, which I wanted to fry just before serving so it would be crispy. When his friend went to the bathroom to make *wudu* (ablutions for prayer) and pray, he started questioning me in a whisper. He said that I was going to pay for not being ready, and that I was trying to embarrass him in front of his friend. I tried to explain my reasoning, that I was doing my best to plan a nice visit. He started shoving me around, then took the hot oil and dumped it in the sink. I went to my room and started packing. He came in and got so mad, he put a pillow over my head and tried to smother me. I packed the car, took my son, and left to my sister's. I felt safe that I could leave because he would not do anything in front of people, and his friend was still there. His friend left right after I did. My sister wanted to

photograph my bruises but I refused. I went back two days later.

He also abused me in front of my son. One day he did not like the spaghetti I fixed for dinner saying that it was over cooked. I snapped back that it was the best I could do after working all day and being tired. He dumped an entire platter of spaghetti on my head, which I then had to clean up. My son at first was laughing, thinking it was a joke, but after seeing me crying he realized it was not. He told his babysitter the next day, and she questioned me. I, of course, brushed her off.

I stuck in there with the marriage, and somehow we managed to work it out for short periods of time. During one period of relative calm, my son started asking for a little brother or sister. The marriage had been doing fairly well for the past five months, so we started trying for a second child. I figured that at least my son would not be alone, and I would stop bearing children after number two, even if I eventually had to leave the marriage. Three months into the pregnancy, the beating started again. I finally left. I packed my car and my son, and really left.

My husband was so mad when I left, because his secret was out. He was very threatening to me in front of the friends who were trying to help. He lost his temper and blamed me for everything, saying that I was a bad wife not tending to his needs, and a bad Muslim. The Muslim brothers from our community listened to him, believing I was at fault, and a bad wife for leaving my husband. The Muslim brothers said that, in separation or divorce, the shame was on the woman, and after all, I went to live with non-Muslims. I did not find support from very many Muslims in my community. For three months, my son and I stayed with a couple of women from work, going from house to house, keeping all my belongings in my car, and sleeping in their living rooms.

I found that I could qualify for reduced housing, and I got my own apartment. One time my husband came over to my apartment with the excuse of seeing our son. He was only there for 10 minutes before he started hitting on my 7 month pregnant belly, accusing me of having an affair. I sat quietly and did not say a word or move. He finally left. As I was getting up to lock the door he came back in. I sat down quickly and waited. He yelled some more but did not touch me, and then left. I got up and locked the door. I never let him in again until the day of the baby's delivery, and I had to get a restraining order against him.

False rumors were flying about me in the community, and I was under a tremendous amount of stress from all sides. Some sisters would sneak me money they collected, or give me furniture from families who were moving. Everyone wanted to give me advice and tell me what to do.

When it was time to deliver my baby, I wanted my husband to be there, even though I felt my family thought I was crazy, and I thought I was crazy. In reality they were concerned for me and the implications of the restraining order being broken with him being present. I wanted him to see that it was his child. He knew it was his child, but at least seeing the child would shut him up, as well as stop any rumors he had spread about me. Also, I did not want to give him an opportunity to later say that I stole the memory of his child's birth from him.

I was scheduled for an induction. On the morning of the delivery day my husband came over saying he wanted to drive me to the hospital. My sister was already with me when he arrived, and the moment he walked in the door he was looking around to start a fight. He found his target. He saw a video tape that I had borrowed from a girlfriend on top of the television. He started questioning me about where I got it, when I got it, and who had been there with me watching it. It was a good, trusted friend of mine who he felt threatened by, and he had forbidden me to be friends with her. He was enraged. He started raising his voice and saying derogatory statements to me. He started raising his hand to me when my sister stepped in and threatened to call the police. She reminded him that the focus was on me, the baby, and my medical situation.

During the delivery I was under so much stress that my blood pressure shot up. He insisted on being right by my side while I was in labor. He started talking to me about coming back to him, telling me how I could not make it on my own, etc. The nurse was monitoring my blood pressure, which was continuing to go up, so my sister had him removed from the room. He was only allowed to return to the room if he agreed to sit in the corner and keep quiet. He did. After the delivery, the nurse offered him the umbilical cord to cut and he refused, so my sister gladly performed the task. Although it almost took the life out of me, the great efforts I made to include him were successful in clearing his mind of the imaginary affair he had dreamed up, and all talk on the subject stopped. The child was the spitting image of our elder son. I named the child.

A few months later his parents were coming for a visit. He begged me to come back to him, and he agreed to counseling. I went back to him against the better judgment of myself and those who knew me. We went to two counseling sessions, and he stopped going.

I did seek the advice of the local imam when he had a guest scholar visiting, and I asked my husband to attend a private session with the scholar. The imam seemed to not want to interfere, but the scholar asked me to leave the room after hearing my story of the marriage; he wanted to talk to my husband alone. After the discussion was over he spoke to me privately. I was sure he was going to take my husband's side as others had done, but I was wrong. He was very supportive of me and told me that he had told my husband to make changes in himself first, support me, and make me happy, then he would see results and changes in me. I really appreciated this man and finally felt like I was not wrong for my perspective on the marriage.

What was supposed to be a one month visit from his parents turned into two and a half years. It was nice at first! The pressure was off me. When he started acting up, his mother would calm him down. His behavior was so unpredictable and irrational during our marriage; I just thought he was a very emotional person. Although I had previously suspected it, I still had not put the label of an addiction to drugs into the picture. All the signs were there, I just had to connect the dots, and I would find evidence of prescription drug usage.

We slept in separate rooms until his extended family came for a two week visit, then we had to share our room again. I was happy they were there, but I got pregnant six months after I had just had my second child. He was so happy about the pregnancy, and I was numb.

He had plans to travel to another country to go to school, and I refused to go due to being pregnant. So the plan was to deliver the baby in the U.S., and then I would follow with the kids the next year. That scared me. I figured that at least in America I had rights and I could support myself. I had my mother remind me about the movie *Not Without My Daughter*, and my inner voice that I tried so hard to suppress said "Don't let the perpetrator take you to the second location, it is sure death." But I decided that as long as he was not beating me and was respecting me, then for the sake of my children, I would stay with him. I was unhappy, unloved, and lonely, but I would stay. I convinced myself that if I was stupid enough to marry him then I would stay with him; it was my destiny.

He was gone, for the duration of my pregnancy, out of the country. He had gone back to school to change his career, and chose a school in the country of his birth, while his parents stayed with me. He visited once and refused to even hug me, saying that he didn't want to harm the baby. My logical question was to ask how he thought he would harm the baby by hugging me, and his response was to ignore the question. So my little voice inside returned to the surface again. Was he having an affair? Had he had one in the past? All these questions ran through my head.

After I gave birth to the baby with his mother and my sister by my side, his parents left for a visit out of the country, and he returned. I finally found proof in the house of his prescription drug abuse when I found him taking pills from a large bottle he had been hiding in the garage. He knew he was caught and was clearly nervous about me knowing.

I was alone with him for three months when the abuse started again. The last straw for me this time was not when he locked me in my room and threatened to break my arm if I dared leave, or when I wanted to call the police and slept in a locked room with the police phone and phone number under my pillow, but it was when he dragged me down the hall by my hair and started kicking me in front of my two-year-old child who raised both hands and said, "Stop." I realized that his behavior was not Islamic. It was not love. It was not respect. It was not going to change. I had to make a change.

His parents were coming back in one week. I went to the *masjid* and prayed for guidance about what to do. A friend was there, and she asked me if I wanted to talk. I explained the situation to her. She suggested that I give it a week, clean the house, prepare food, and wait to see Allah's answer. I waited. On the second day of their return, he started in on me in front of his parents. They tried to stop him, but they couldn't. I quietly got my handbag, with all my important papers, and said to my mother-in-law, "I can't do it anymore." She went and told my husband, who refused to give me the children or the car. I said, "That's fine, I'll come back later once I am settled." I walked out the front door and did not look back.

As I walked away from our home, with each step I prayed this simple prayer, "O Allah, if you want this for me keep my feet moving, or give me a sign to return, and for your sake I will return." Allah allowed me to keep walking and no signs appeared. I walked to the house of a friend whom I could trust, about two miles away. The friend was someone who would not judge me, and would not call my husband, or try to talk me out of leaving.

I called a rental car company from my friend's home, and they came to pick me up. I drove to a nearby apartment complex and requested the first available two-bedroom apartment they had. They asked me how much money I earned. I explained I had just left my husband. I called him in front of them and politely explained to him that I needed to know how much child support he was planning to give me each month. They wrote it down, we signed the papers, and they handed me the keys to the apartment. My mother-in-law brought the car and the children to my apartment that night when the children started crying for mommy. She made a half hearted attempt to get me to come back. I called no one except my mother. I told her that we were safe, and that I would contact her soon.

Before I reached that point, many friends and family members had counseled me. Many gave me their opinions whether or not I wanted them, but in the end I had to make up my own mind, and until I did, no words could make me leave him. In front of Allah, I wanted to be able to say that I had tried everything I could to make it work. On Judgment Day, I will be proud to stand in front of Allah because I feel I tried everything I could. I had to leave for the sake of my children and myself. I love my children, and I am thankful to have them, but I wish I was strong enough to have left after two weeks into the marriage.

Two long years later, with a great deal of strength and trust in Allah, I legally became a free woman. My husband fought me all the way, calling Child Protective Services when the baby got a black eye from hitting the edge of the coffee table, and calling the police when I refused to let him see the children when he was in a fit of rage. He even tried to act as his own lawyer after three attorneys quit on him. He disrespected me in court and tried to prove that I was an unfit mother. Allah protected me. He refused to pay child support and quit jobs so that they could not garnish his wages. Allah provided for me. He would make promises to the children and let them down. They saw the reality of their father on their own terms within their own relationships.

I was happy being a single mother. I had my children, I had a job and, I was my own person again. I was healing, finally really healing. I knew who I was, what I wanted, and what I was not willing, under any circumstances, to put up with. I deserved respect and I would not settle for anything less in any relationship. I was not looking for another man in my life, ever. Men stunk as far as I was concerned. But Allah had other plans for me.

About a year later a Muslim man started working at my company. As co-workers we spoke about work issues, and as Muslims we would talk about Islam. We went to a few group activities together where he got to know my children.

Several months later, he proposed via the internet. I said, "No thank you." He sent me a card saying he had no hard feelings, and he hoped that we could remain friends. A week later I mentioned to my sister how the man had proposed, and about the sweet card. She thought I was blind to turn him down and urged me to give him a chance. I prayed about it, and two weeks later I ignored my pride and asked him if the offer was still open. He was shocked but said that it was. We met with my sister for lunch, where he was critically picked over. He realized that taking on three children was a challenge, but he really wanted to marry me and the children for the sake of Allah. We courted for a while, and we all got to know each other better. One day, my son who had turned nine asked me if he was going to marry us. I said, "Yes, but only if you and I agree." My son agreed.

I really laid it out to my suitor. I was going to make sure he knew what he was getting into. I was tough with him and explained that I would not accept him demanding me to do anything. I was my own person, etc. He was always kind and always respectful and said, "Of course, don't worry." He realized that I had really been hurt in the past, but felt that by being kind and loving, he could overcome my fears. I was very honest with him about what I wanted and did not want, and he did the same. It was a match! We were engaged and took time to get to know each other in the Islamic way of courtship. I met with his family, and although they had concerns about their son marrying me with three young children, they also accepted all of us.

One day after my son's ball game, we all went to my apartment for lunch. I did not have a meal ready so I said, "How about a toasted cheese sandwich with soup?" He said, "Really? That's my favorite!" I calmed down a great deal, and developed a trust with him that I had not previously known. We are still very happily married, and I still love to make him toasted cheese sandwiches and soup.

Currently, my children speak to their father, and have seen him once in the last three years. He is still making promises he does not keep and is unpredictable. He is still very critical of my parental role. He is, however, paying child support and talks of paying for college. He wants to be a father but does not know where to start or how to fill the job. The children have to understand the reality of their father on their own terms, but it is my job to protect them. It's a fine line between helping them to understand and not letting my feelings about him get in the way. May Allah protect them.

My home life today is about work that needs to get done, and who is the best person for the job. I have a job outside the home, so some evenings when I am late, or I have a meeting, by the time I arrive home, dinner is either on the table or is being cooked by my husband. I just call and say that I am running late or that I have a meeting, and we work it out. We divide the household chores, and help each other when one of us has yet to finish. Why? Because we understand that we are both trying our best, and picking up the pieces after each other makes us happy. We do get frustrated, and get into small disagreements, but it never turns into a yelling match or a physical fight. The underlying feeling between us is to not crush the

other person. Several times, when my husband has had the day off and I am working, I'll come home from a long day and find the house clean and the food ready.

Parenting the children as they grow into teenagers is challenging for both of us. One day, after a week of difficulty with two of the children, I said, "Do you love me?" My husband said, "Yes." I said, "Are you glad you married me?" He just laughed, and then we laughed together. I always leave the last cookie or piece of cake for him, and he does the same for me. One time, a cookie was still around after a month, and I finally said, "I left that for you, why didn't you eat it?" He said, "Because I was leaving it for you." We agreed to let each other know from now on, so that we don't waste food.

My husband is supportive of my personal activities, and I am supportive of his. That means we freely give our time and energy for each other when it is needed. For example, if I am on a volunteer committee, and the committee is having a special weekend event, my husband takes the children for the weekend, and contributes any free time he has so that I can participate in my event. It's not one-sided, and his good example makes me want to give back to him even more.

I always thought about what a good marriage should be. When reading my examples, it might seem easy to say, "Of course that's what makes a good marriage." Yet for someone who is in a bad marriage, was in a bad marriage, or has not seen examples of a good one, understanding the concept of a good marriage is like a shining light. It really does take the husband *and* wife to be compromising, non-judgmental, and loving to make a marriage work with two happy spouses.

My husband and I talk to each other about what is happening with our individual activities or events, and give each other advice and feedback. There is no jealousy. His success is mine and my success is his, and Allah is above it all, working and planning better than we can ever know.

Alhamdulillah (all praise be to God)! Allah is Greater! Thank you Allah for bringing him to me; you knew what was best for my life. I really appreciate my husband and respect him for accepting the challenge of helping to raise children that are not biologically his own. I now can see that true love does not come with fear and anxiety, but with acceptance and peace. I respect him for his strength, and he respects me for mine. We complete each other, comfort each other, and advise each other without judgment or strings attached. I have become a new person with peace in my heart.

BROKEN WINGS NO MORE

By Merjanne Hope¹

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

-Maya Angelou

Before beginning, I ask every reader to recognize that this story is a sole reflection of my feelings. We all know that there are many dimensions to any story. If I could highlight one, it would be my transformation from a naïve victim, to an empowered woman, who now guards her needs with wings of awareness and self-respect. It is my sincere hope that readers will focus on the lessons I gained, and apply them positively in their own lives. Writing this has also been a challenge because it is not easy for me to highlight negative acts of people, especially my parents. I have a tremendous amount of appreciation and love in my heart for them. If it weren't for their undying support, I would not be the strong, confident, and educated woman I am today. I continue to experience a range of emotions, but at the end of the day, I have forgiveness in my heart for everyone mentioned in my story. It is an ongoing journey for all of us, no doubt. My heart is full of happiness, not regret. The memories that last in my mind are the ones that make my heart smile. Finally, I am not perfect, but I will continue to make the choice of seeing everything, and everyone who crosses paths with me, in a positive light.

I am one who always tends to give excuses for people, regardless of the circumstances. I do not give up on people easily, and perhaps that is why I find it difficult to highlight destructive behaviors about significant figures in my life. Growing up, I had the reputation of someone who always smiled and made others feel good. As far as I was concerned, making other people happy made me feel happy. It also meant that I would not reveal when I felt sad or angry, because I feared that I would not be revered as the "go to" girl for support. In time, it became incredibly difficult to show others my true feelings, even if I wasn't feeling happy. If I couldn't make others happy, than how would I be happy? Without realizing it, I was conditioning myself to be dependent on other people's happiness, and in doing so, I was denying myself the right to receive happiness from others. That was partly because I did not have a clear idea of my own personal needs. I was always the giver, and found it extremely hard to be at the receiving end. Hence I've had to

¹ A pseudonym has been used for privacy purposes.

learn that it is OK to be direct, without thinking that I am being rude. So it truly was a revolutionary moment when I discovered that I could address other people effectively, without compromising my own happiness. With this frame of mind, I begin my story.

At the age of 20, I had just started wearing *hijab* (scarf covering the hair) and was experiencing a “spiritual” awakening inside of me. Putting on hijab was a very empowering experience for me, as it was my personal decision, solely made without any outside influence whatsoever. I did not realize, however, that I was going through a new phase in my life. I was in the process of revamping my entire outlook on life. A newfound spirit was blossoming inside of me. I fell in love with life. I wanted to take that energy and put it into appreciation, thanking God for everything! I was very open to listening to religious speakers, and became very active religiously at my college. The more time I spent with my Muslim peers, the more I truly felt that I had established my identity as an American Muslim. I began to relearn Islam from its basic roots. The more I learned, the more my relationship with God became stronger. I was consumed with so much love and peace in my heart that I was truly drunk with it. It was at that point that I felt I wanted to share my feelings with someone else and grow together.

Enter a suitor I met in Egypt. My parents would take me to Egypt every summer growing up. It was to be my first time that year, to go back to Egypt wearing a scarf, and to have my extended family see me, the “new” me. You see, my parents were never the type who pushed *hijab* or ultra modest clothing on me. And when my relatives found out that I started wearing *hijab*, they felt that I should wait until after I got married, as if marriage defines when a woman should wear *hijab*. Little did anyone know that I was already thinking of these things in a way that I never had before. On one night of that particular summer, my parents introduced me to a suitor who was actually happy to see me covered, and showed awe towards the fact that I was raised in America, and yet carried such strong religious ideals. He talked so highly of God and spirituality; I was equally impressed by his persona as well. It was truly refreshing to talk about God, and I instantly felt that I had found “the one.” He was feeding into a huge void that I needed, and I was taking in every second of it. Within two weeks we were engaged. We continued to see each other for the remaining two weeks of my stay in Egypt, and then I had to return to the States. Our form of long distance communication was online, and we both agreed it would be a great tool to continue to get to know one another.

On Labor Day weekend, I attended the ISNA (Islamic Society of North America) conference. I attended all the lectures on marriage and family practices. I took any, and all, information that I gained, and used it as discussion topics during chat sessions online with my fiancé. It was during those chat sessions that I discovered that we disagreed constantly. We were debating more than we were agreeing. My feelings started to turn into concern. For example, we completely differed on birth control. Even though I loved the idea of having children at the time, I still felt it was

my right of choice to use birth control, especially since I was young and inexperienced. He claimed it was forbidden, and said he would never agree to it.

Another major concern for me were his comments on women's rights in Islam, which completely differed from those which I had learned in various lectures regarding a woman's right to a marriage contract. He argued that the marriage contract is only valid if it is a verbal one, not written, per how it was done at the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The more I communicated with my fiancé, the more my instincts told me he was not "the one." It immediately became apparent when the subject of polygamy was brought up. He felt that women had no right to leave a marriage should her husband remarry. The red flag for me was not just our differing views, but more about how adamant he was in believing his opinion was solely right. I let him clearly know that I could not handle a marriage situation like that, and that in such a situation, I would most probably leave.

I sensed an air of arrogance and male dominance combined, especially when he repeatedly mentioned the duties and roles of a woman in marriage. He highlighted that she must listen to her husband, and all but worship him basically. I understood that his opinion was based on an actual *hadith* (sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad), however when a person hears such comments in the beginning stages of a relationship, along with other red flags as mentioned above, something is perceived as wrong.²

What he did not yet know was that I had zero tolerance for people who are relentless in arguing or debating without listening to reason. I felt uncomfortable with the idea that there were expectations for me to be someone that I might not very well be. I had opinions, and I wanted to know that my opinions mattered too. I also knew that he would be someone who was going to see my "true colors." While I knew I could hide my feelings from the outside world, I would not be able to do that with him. Therefore, I wanted to be sure I was going to live with someone who could nurture my spirituality, not change it. I started to feel suffocated. By the close of the ISNA conference, I made a decision to end the engagement in the near future.

After more talks that confirmed what I felt, I let my fiancé know that that I was essentially not comfortable with the way we were communicating. I felt intimidated, and I did not like that I couldn't be myself. I had issues with the birth control ban and the inability to have my own marriage contract. Needless to say, he was very shocked that I felt this way, and found my reasons completely insufficient. Moreover my parents agreed with him! Unfortunately, they felt I was being rash in my

² Editor's Note: The Qur'an and *Hadith* clearly limit worship to God, but some *Hadith* may be taken out of context to support male chauvinism.

quick decision, and that the ISNA conference had been a bad influence. Additionally, they were convinced that the "evil eye" had played a role.³

For the entire fall semester, my parents and I argued vehemently over the issue. My parents were very enamored with my suitor and felt that he would fulfill all the voids they weren't able to fill, like Arabic literacy, and an Orthodox knowledge of Islam. Additionally, they were impressed with my suitor's educational accomplishments and his profession (he was a medical doctor, and passed with High Honors), and his willingness to move to America (he was born and raised in Egypt) and start again from scratch. Therefore, they felt that since he was such a "great catch," evil eye was surely a reason why I changed my opinion about the engagement so abruptly. Had my parents and I had a functional communication style together, they would have understood just how much I needed someone who could nurture my newfound spiritual connection that I had established with God.

During the winter break one thing led to another, and the arguments with my parents spiraled downwards to the extent that I completely failed the entire semester at college, and my mother fell very ill. She decided to travel to Egypt, and I accompanied her to ensure her safety along the way. I had not intended to see my fiancé again, however news traveled quickly that I was back in town. Although my stay was originally supposed to be for just two weeks, God had a different plan for me. During that period my ex-fiancé visited several times, along with his mother, in efforts to convince me that my conclusions were inconclusive and immaturely processed. His mom was fully convinced that the evil eye had affected me. My ex-fiancé was really focused on showing me his different sides to gain my confidence in the fact that he was multi-dimensional, not just the narrow-minded individual I had in my mind. Little by little, I slowly warmed up to him again, and felt that I should reconsider him for marriage. I ended up skipping the spring semester at my university entirely, and remained in Egypt to take the time to really get to know him.

Yet again, after one month, I came to the conclusion that we were not rightly suited for each other, and broke off the engagement once again. I immediately requested to go back to the States; however my mom was convinced that I should reside in Egypt for an "unknown" period of time. That just led to more arguing and constant bickering. While I know in my heart that she felt she was doing the best for me, she was only putting me into more isolation, both physically and mentally.

After two months in Egypt, I became so vulnerable and mentally weakened that I was desperate for anyone to talk to. I could not understand why my life was being

³ It is believed that the "evil eye" is caused by envy elicited by the good luck of fortunate people, and may result in their misfortune. Good fortune may appear in the form of material possessions, or because the target of envy possesses intelligence, beauty, good health, or many children.

wasted away, and why my parents were so unyielding in their efforts to just listen to my needs. All of my extended family members in Egypt were in school, and completely unavailable to talk to me. I had friends who called me from the States, but again, since I was always considered the happy “go to” friend, I did not know how to go to someone and say that I needed help. At that point, my dad came to see what was happening and spent a week lecturing me on the series of failed decisions he felt I was making. He pretty much made it clear that I was not coming back to the States until I got married. He again listed why and how my ex fiancé was bending over backwards to be with me, and how I was throwing the opportunity away carelessly.

By that time I was just feeling worthless. I was so broken down and mentally exhausted from all the alienated feelings surging through me that I came to the conclusion that my father knew best. One concept came to mind that I learned from the marriage conferences regarding the *wali* (marriage guardian).⁴ I thought to myself since he was responsible for me as my *wali* (marriage guardian), he had a vision that I did not have towards my ex-fiancé. And that's exactly what I told him that night, “Dad you are my *wali*. You are responsible for me. If you truly feel that this guy is the one for me, then I will go with it. I cannot see what you see, but I trust you.”

Within two weeks, the *Kitab* (engagement and signing of the marriage contract) ceremony was made, and I was thankfully able to return to America. By the summer my legalized husband came to the States. It was decided that we would live in my parents' house until he could get on his own two feet. The official marriage ceremony was scheduled for winter that same year. Until then, the agreement was that he would study for the medical Boards exams while my parents supported us.

During that time he got to know everyone at my college and in our community. He got very involved with the local *masjid* (mosque) to the extent that he experienced his own spiritual growth and awakening. This awakening only proved all my fears correct. He wanted me to dress differently, talk differently, laugh differently and think differently too. [Remember, again, I am a very cheery personality who always smiles. I had just started wearing *hijab* a year before this all started. I still wore jeans and found fashionable ways to match my scarf to my outfits.] He started to make comments about my closest friends not being religious enough. He did not want me talking or mixing with any men. In fact he would tell me that a man always had a reason to talk to a woman, but never vice versa. I could not wear certain colors, like red, or anything that he would consider showy.

⁴ Editor's Note: See Marwa Zeini's chapter in this volume for more detailed explanation of this term.

Within four months after the wedding ceremony was complete, he began mentioning polygamy again. Of course I was devastated, especially since we were still considered newlyweds! It resulted in sweeping arguments that essentially left me feeling very hurt. He would tell me that I should not feel hurt, and that it was a matter of "increasing the *ummah*" (worldwide Muslim community). He was really serious about this matter and found it surprising that I would get so upset.

Over the course of the next year, I became pregnant and had our child. During that entire period, the subject of polygamy was constantly brought up by my husband. In every instance, he was putting a dagger in my heart and adding more salt to my wounds. He would tell me that it would be considered *haram* (Islamically unlawful) if I left the marriage in response to him marrying a second wife. He cited a ruling alleging that if a woman fails to explicitly mention in her marriage contract that she will leave her spouse for practicing polygamy, she cannot leave her husband for that reason. Obviously I was livid because he knew very well how I felt about polygamy before we got married, and after. Secondly, our marriage contract was verbal. I felt so trapped, and so helpless. At one point I remember just conceding to it all, and telling him to just go and do it, and get it over with. Just "talking" about it seemed worse. Meanwhile he became so enthralled with his religiosity that he decided to leave his medical studies all together to become a *sheikh* (Islamic scholar). He became very judgmental towards people who differed in their views with him, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Anyone who didn't agree with him, as far as he was concerned, was going against God, period. If I went against his wishes, he would call me *ma'seeya* (the one who disobeys God). I would hear this type of talk on a daily basis and would become defiant and angry. Talking with him became so difficult that just to engage him in a conversation, I would have to bring up authentic *hadiths* (sayings or actions of Prophet Muhammad) to back up my opinions. Every subject had to be about religion, or it had no value in his eyes. Jokes were disregarded.

I was constantly trying to please him just to get any attention for myself. He did not see me as someone who was equal to his religious level, and therefore my entire presence was invalidated. His verbal comments hit my most vulnerable feelings inside, because his comments were geared towards how I practiced my faith. He labeled me as a "Christian Muslim," one who, as he described it, just believed that everyone is going to Heaven. The constant judging, sacrificing, and mental breakdowns that I endured became a daily struggle. Eventually his comments began to break me down. My body was already going through so many other changes with the pregnancy and birth as it was. Besides all the religious issues, my real problem was the fact that I could not make my husband happy by just being myself. It was really killing me that I could make everyone but the one person who was living with me happy. Since I had grown to be dependent on the happiness of those around me, my husband's dissatisfaction with me invariably meant that I also felt miserably dissatisfied.

During that period, everyone in my social circle had noticed a significant religious shift in me. Yet it seemed that he only focused on how much more I still needed to do. For me, it was not about doing the acts for God anymore. It became about proving myself to my husband in order to meet his expectations; to receive my basic needs, like love and companionship. I wanted to be in the same room and have him notice the “me” that I felt I had lost. I just needed to feel loved and appreciated, so desperately. I struggled to understand why he could not understand that my intentions were so sincere. I needed him to understand that it would take time for me to reach the spiritual levels that he had apparently reached. I felt hurt that he did not have the patience, nor wanted to wait for me to catch up. I really was desperately trying. I would cite Qur’anic verses and *hadiths* (sayings of Prophet Muhammad) to defend why I felt he should demonstrate “love and mercy” towards me, although I felt I did not need a *hadith* or religious scripture to tell him how to express such fundamental concepts. They should have come naturally! He justified his actions confidently and felt that God was simply on his side. His rebuttals consisted of examples of people who followed the words of God without taking time to think or feel. He wanted me to improve rapidly in that manner, and I simply could not. Despite that, I highlighted all that I was doing (as if to offer myself on a pedestal), yet internally, I still blamed myself bitterly. It was frustrating that I just could not seem to do a good enough job to gain his recognition.

It was a true test of faith at that point. It seemed that everything in my situation contradicted itself. After all, my objective had been to seek a spouse who would grow with me spiritually, and essentially make me feel closer to God. He was supposed to be the one that brought me closer to God, but was ironically pushing me further away. Every pure emotion I felt towards love, companionship, and spirituality was being robbed inside of me. He was so thickly blinded with his religious goals that he simply could not comprehend that he was hurting me, alienating me, silencing me, oppressing me, and ultimately killing a very innocent belief I had inside regarding the goodness of humanity. Everything seemed meaningless. Since I was incapable of seeing things for myself, I figured I could try to act like him, to show that we were not so different. Then maybe he would have felt that I was on his side, and he would finally love me unconditionally. My attempts made me perceive life negatively, because it meant that I was shutting out my feelings. Overall, life was no longer beautiful. The world seemed a sad, pitiful, empty, and dismal place to live. People seemed ignorant, petty, and materialistic. I knew it was only an act. The irony of it all was that I was lying to achieve spiritual acceptance. Yet as hard as I tried, I could not keep up the façade. My feelings were not genuine, and therefore my actions were inconsistent. I was extremely frustrated by my inability to hide my feelings. I wanted so desperately to be like those people who follow without “thinking.” In order to love this person, I had to meet some religious level that was seemingly impossible to reach. Reflecting back, I am truly amazed at how I was willing to deny my instincts to that extent, and allow others to define how I should think, act, and worship.

Meanwhile, I was still enduring constant discussions of polygamy, and was trying really hard to accept the idea. He, too, was frustrated because he did not have the religious companion he wanted either. The breaking point for me was when he said he would solve our problem by marrying a woman whom he felt would meet his religious needs, yet would still "keep me for pity's sake." I cannot find words to describe how that made me feel. I had already broken a million times before, but that comment literally pushed me over the edge to the point where I became numb. All I could think to myself was, "Wow, am I that useless in his eyes?" I was still stubbornly looking for reasons to understand why and how one's spouse can put a person through such emotional abuse. I had never encountered anyone with such a guiltless personality. Everything for him seemed so mechanical and pragmatic. As if one plus one equaled two. If I was religious enough, he could then accept me. Anything less was simply registered as "not a good Muslim" in his eyes, and therefore was unacceptable. He did not try to search within himself to question his actions, or believe that he needed to. As far as he was concerned, there was no acceptable reason as to why I could feel pain. No matter how hard I cried, or how hard I screamed, he was incapable of comprehending that his style of conditional love hurt me. So I realized that I was never going to meet his expectations. He had already given up on me anyway, and therefore I told him that I could not live with him, and I required time to literally breathe again.

That particular scenario awakened life lessons for me that I will never forget about. Because my self-confidence had been so dependent on his acceptance, when he chose to shut me out, I had become helpless and vulnerable. Had I the confidence to feel a sense of self-worth, despite what he thought, I might have been able to shield myself from such a vulnerable state. I needed to know that my opinions were worthy, above and beyond what anyone else thought, period. It was the first time I realized that I had to find myself, and to define my needs. That was excruciatingly hard for me, as I had never thought in that way before, and I worried that it was selfish. I began to write, and over the course of a week, I ended up writing over twenty pages. They were not just about my personal needs; they were writings describing how I thought, how I worshipped, and how I saw life. I realized that I had done a horrible job of showing others all that I had inside me. I cried a lot, but with every written word, I was emerging as an independent thinker who was finally finding her voice. I also discovered that during my marriage, every aspect of my faith had been crushed. However, I was able to identify my scarf as a symbol of pureness that I had once felt regarding my inner spirituality. Thankfully, had it not been for that initial period where I felt the beauty of faith on my own, I would have never had anything to distinguish between true spirituality and the oppression I had been enduring. I was able to connect back to times in my life when I felt confident, and surely that period had been my strongest. Those memories became my light, my inspiration, and my strength to date. As a result, I was able to hold onto the belief that God would never leave me, and would surround me with His love regardless of

how my spouse felt. I would talk to myself encouragingly, and find complacency in the idea that God knew my heart, and my intentions.

Regarding my desire for separation, my spouse told me that I could not leave our “marital room” and that if I did, I’d be disobeying him. Next, he told me that if I chose to divorce, I would lose the rights to my dowry and the gifts that I had gained in my marriage, since it would be considered a *khul’* (disengagement from marriage), not a divorce.⁵ I chose to leave anyway. I did not care about the gifts and possessions I had. My issue was core survival, and I needed my decisions to prioritize our child’s needs, as he was an infant at the time. I was so mentally and physically distraught that I knew it was not a safe environment for either of us. During that period our communication was meager. We did try to reconcile in many ways, but to no avail. When we reached a point where we both were convinced that our lives were better off apart, we sought a *sheikh* to finalize our divorce.

Even though my father came with me, the *sheikh* requested that he wait outside the session room. I felt quite intimidated to talk to the *sheikh*, especially since his English was broken, and my Arabic was worse. Secondly, the *sheikh* exuded this coldness that only made me feel more intimidated. It was hard enough to be sitting in front of someone who had no knowledge of my past or my needs, let alone to discuss my marital problems! My husband used the opportunity to speak solely in classical Arabic, and described how he considered me to be a *ma’seeya* spouse (not an Islamically fit wife). He knew very well that I could not speak that kind of Arabic, and could not understand every word to even be able to defend myself from his accusations. Again, I became so bitterly irritated, and felt that I was being victimized and silenced all over again. If my dad had been allowed to attend the session, he could have at least spoken out in my defense. Surely the *sheikh* knew that as a woman I’d be intimidated, or at the least, a little apprehensive. Again, I found myself feeling marginalized by the very people who were supposed to be “religious” and righteous. I became filled with rage at the virtual silence being imposed upon me due to my lack of fluency in Arabic.

So I decided to speak up, and demanded that everything be stated in English. I was shouting, and throwing out my frustrations. I did not care to hide behind a happy face anymore. I was angry and felt that I was being taken advantage of. For the first time, an “outsider” saw the rage inside me exposed, and it just so happened to be the *sheikh*, of all people. I became very loud, and probably incoherent, in between the snuffles and shakiness in my attempts to get air. I truly felt suffocated and had to fight with myself to speak. My husband was very calm and portrayed excellent self control. He went on to say that I was a disobedient wife, and that I

⁵ Editor’s Note: See Marwa Zeini’s chapter in this volume for details about the different types of divorce in Islam.

could not fulfill his spiritual needs. His examples included my choosing to leave our home without his express permission. In my defense, I was able to explain to the *sheikh* my reason for leaving the house, and thankfully, he at least sided with me on that. His exact words were, "Every woman should feel safe in her home. If she doesn't feel safe, either physically or emotionally, than she has the right to leave, with or without her husbands' permission." The tears were streaming down my face so rapidly. It was the first time I was hearing from a religious figure that my actions were not "bad," or "wrong" or *ma'seeya*. In a twist of irony, at the point where a person in my shoes would typically have felt a sense of loss, I felt so triumphant, just because the *sheikh* had validated my stance on that one issue. It was important to hear a religious figure tell me that I was not wrong to leave my house, and that I was not *ma'seeya*. We discussed many other points, and by the conclusion of the meeting, our divorce was granted.

For me, the divorce meant that I had been set free. I could finally rest, knowing that there was a tomorrow, with new opportunities to search for what I had originally been looking for. I knew that challenges lay ahead, however I also knew the hardest and most painful part for me was over. I had an incredible amount of experience to reflect on, and heal from. For starters, I cannot emphasize enough how important a parents' role is in the life of young adults during their period of soul searching and awakening. Especially during the high school and college years, it is imperative for parents to be aware of any new phases their child is going through, and to take the initiative to talk it over. A new phase makes every person openly vulnerable, because they feel like they are lone pioneers. That is why I felt so thirsty to find someone who could understand my new persona, and grow with me. If my parents and I had had better lines of communication, they would have been aware of the fact that I was radically changing. Hence, they could have tried to keep things more consistent in my life, instead of promoting major decisions like marriage. Even a behavior, like starting to wear hijab, should be considered a new phase. Just saying "Congratulations!" is not enough. Sure, an act of faith demonstrates nobility, but it is important that we all clarify the reasons that led to such a decision. Were they by choice? What impressions influenced the decision? What factors elicited the change? A parent can help slow that process down by discussing such issues and essentially validating them. In my case, I had dismissed my initial instincts and concerns towards my suitor/fiancé, when I should have stood my ground firmly. I take full responsibility for my choices. Having said that, my parents should have honored those doubts I had and validated my needs, even if they disagreed with them. Had they done so, perhaps I would have chosen differently.

Despite the memories, my fervent need to remain steadfast in my own spiritual growth continues. That spiritual growth now includes my self-worth. I have both my parents and my ex-husband to truly thank for that. I learned that everyone has their own vision of what faith and spirituality is, and not everyone practices it the same way. It is not OK to think that everyone should worship the exact same way. I learned that people will not understand what I want, unless I define it for myself

first. My advice to women is firstly, to educate yourself about your Islamic rights, above and beyond anything else. Secondly, ensure you are able to clearly articulate your needs. Literally take the time to write them down. We need to define for ourselves what is acceptable for us, and what is not. If we do not know our boundaries, then how will we be able to teach others our expectations? As parents, every Muslim family should emphasize teaching their children their rights, just as importantly as prayer and worship. If the communication lines are open, marriage discussions should come easily. Parents should be able to validate their daughters' feelings when addressing potential suitors interested in marriage. Essentially, their daughters' needs will need to be stated in a marriage contract, where witnesses are there to ensure that everyone understands what those needs are. That includes a comprehensive discussion about divorce.

To conclude, I still love making people happy; however, I learned that I do not need their happiness to achieve my own. I have discovered that I do not need to act happy, or show that I am perfect, because I am not, and never will be. And that is okay. For every emotional, physical, and spiritual need, there must be parameters that are clearly defined for them. I learned to teach people what my parameters are. I now understand that it is not being selfish, and it is not being rude. It is self-respect. Essentially we need to know that it is okay to guard our feelings because we are effectively showing others our feelings matter. And yes, I matter.

A SURVIVOR'S STORY

By Jennifer Mohamed¹

I am a survivor of incest. It was not until I was in my late forties—a wife and mother of grown children—that I began to experience feelings of unease and overwhelming sadness. I thought it was merely another bout of depression since I had lived with various degrees of depression throughout my adolescence and adult life. Somehow Allah (God) guided me to seek professional help. As I was innocently recounting my childhood memories, I was suddenly flooded by the horrific memory of the first incident of sexual abuse at the hands of my father when I was four years old. No words can adequately describe the shock of such a discovery.

As the therapy progressed, more and more memories surfaced. It was as if the dam had burst. The memories came unbidden—sometimes while I was at work, sometimes when I was out for a walk with my husband, and sometimes when I was in bed. Nothing could stop them however hard I tried to think of something else. My ability to concentrate disappeared; I was unable to sleep for fear of dreaming; and—whenever I was alone at home—I spent hours on the couch howling like a wounded animal. The pain was unbearable, physically and emotionally.

Over the course of several months, I uncovered other horrible incidents culminating with my father raping me when I was 16. That is perhaps the worst of all memories. I remembered making a conscious decision while he was raping me a second time that I would not “feel” anything. Mercifully, I still cannot—and do not wish to—remember how many times I was raped after that. However, I do remember not being able to pray for a whole year at about the time the rapes occurred. Was that because I felt Allah had abandoned me, or was it because I felt guilty for allowing my father to perpetrate such heinous acts? I do not have the answer, but pray that Allah will forgive us both for breaking His law.

As painful as the memories were, they helped me understand some things about my family. Now it made sense that—as a child—I often woke up in the morning to find myself under my bed: I was trying to hide from my father. There was another reason I was hiding and trying to make myself as small as possible. I uncovered memories of my father shouting at and beating my mother while I was trying to go to sleep. For some reason, this only happened at night. During the day, my father was a “normal” husband and father. I would be “frozen” in bed—or under it. I

¹ A pseudonym has been used for privacy purposes.

could not get up to help my mother, and I could not get away. I tried to block my ears but that didn't help either. The best that I could do was to "forget."

The journey to recovery has been long and hard. Am I fully "recovered?" I do not think so. There is still much work to be done. *Webster's New World Dictionary: Second College Edition* defines incest as "sexual intercourse between persons too closely related to marry legally," and states that the origin of the word comes from the Latin "unchaste." The dictionary, however, does not describe the effects of incest on the victim, nor does it explain the behavior of the perpetrator. I have discovered that incest is a pernicious and insidious act that has far-reaching effects. It has affected my relationship with my husband—and with males in general. It affected my parenting ability, and I am positive that it has contributed to my pervasive sense of not being "good enough."

Alhamdu-lillah (all praise be to God), through therapy and prayer, I have reached a place where I can forgive my father even though I do not understand his behavior. I do believe that his behavior must have been the result of trauma in his own childhood; he may have been a victim of abuse himself. Whatever the reason, I was never able to confront my father. I felt that the harm could not be undone, and I am sure—from the way he lived his life especially towards its end—that he regretted his past sins. May Allah forgive us all for our transgressions.

PART IV: SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES

The first of these is the fact that the world is becoming more and more integrated. The second is the fact that the world is becoming more and more diverse. The third is the fact that the world is becoming more and more complex. The fourth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more uncertain. The fifth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more volatile. The sixth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more unpredictable. The seventh is the fact that the world is becoming more and more chaotic. The eighth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more unstable. The ninth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more dangerous. The tenth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more hostile. The eleventh is the fact that the world is becoming more and more violent. The twelfth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more brutal. The thirteenth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more cruel. The fourteenth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more inhuman. The fifteenth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more dehumanizing. The sixteenth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more alienating. The seventeenth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more isolating. The eighteenth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more lonely. The nineteenth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more empty. The twentieth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more meaningless. The twenty-first is the fact that the world is becoming more and more purposeless. The twenty-second is the fact that the world is becoming more and more directionless. The twenty-third is the fact that the world is becoming more and more aimless. The twenty-fourth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more senseless. The twenty-fifth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more absurd. The twenty-sixth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more ridiculous. The twenty-seventh is the fact that the world is becoming more and more laughable. The twenty-eighth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more contemptible. The twenty-ninth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more despicable. The thirtieth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more detestable. The thirty-first is the fact that the world is becoming more and more hateful. The thirty-second is the fact that the world is becoming more and more loathable. The thirty-third is the fact that the world is becoming more and more repulsive. The thirty-fourth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more disgusting. The thirty-fifth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more repugnant. The thirty-sixth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more offensive. The thirty-seventh is the fact that the world is becoming more and more insulting. The thirty-eighth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more humiliating. The thirty-ninth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more degrading. The fortieth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more demeaning. The forty-first is the fact that the world is becoming more and more degrading. The forty-second is the fact that the world is becoming more and more degrading. The forty-third is the fact that the world is becoming more and more degrading. The forty-fourth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more degrading. The forty-fifth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more degrading. The forty-sixth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more degrading. The forty-seventh is the fact that the world is becoming more and more degrading. The forty-eighth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more degrading. The forty-ninth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more degrading. The fiftieth is the fact that the world is becoming more and more degrading.

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AFFECTING CHANGE AS AN IMAM¹

An Interview with Imam Mohamed Magid²
on June 5, 2006 by Maha B. Alkhateeb

1. From a leaders' perspective, what would you want to hear from an imam in a book on domestic violence?

The first thing I would want to hear from an imam is acknowledgement. Acknowledgement is really a problem in the Muslim community. Imams need to acknowledge the issue of domestic violence in their communities, face the issues, and counsel people. First is acknowledgement. The second thing I'd like to hear is the absolute support that the imam is giving to people in his community who suffer from domestic violence. I would want to hear the imam encourage Muslim communities to put resources together for victims of domestic violence, and encourage other imams and scholars to address the issue from a religious perspective as a support to the victims and survivors. The third thing is that the imam should have a basic knowledge of domestic violence rather than just focusing on Islamic knowledge. Verses that we quote from the Qur'an and the *Hadith*³ all the time, that say Islam is pro-woman and makes women equal, are part of the literature that everyone knows. The real question involves what it takes to implement programs in Muslim communities based on Islamic education to eradicate, and end, the issue of domestic violence.

2. What role do you play in working against domestic violence?

I feel that the purpose of my role as an imam in the community, as well as in my personal life, is to give guidance on issues that concern the community. I believe that imams send signals to members of the community suggesting that

¹ An imam is a religious leader in a Muslim community. He is responsible for leading the congregational prayers, performing marriage and divorce proceedings, providing education, and in many cases, providing counseling. Islam has no ordained clergy; imams are selected by a community based on their knowledge of Islam and leadership capabilities.

² Mohamed Magid is the imam and Executive Director of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) in Sterling, Virginia, a mosque serving over 5000 families. Imam Magid is also Vice-President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA).

³ *Hadith* are recorded traditions and sayings of Prophet Muhammad.

either they are welcome to address certain issues, or that he may turn them away. I find the way that some imams address issues regarding gender relations and divorce to be really troubling. Many women have said that they don't go to specific imams because they already know what they will say regarding the issue of domestic violence. For example, if a woman is experiencing domestic violence and wants to end her marriage, an imam may, instead, encourage her to stay and tell her that it is *haram*⁴ to leave. The imam's perspective on Islam and the *Shari'ah*⁵ can be to either deal with the survivor, or to turn them away. That is number one. I see myself using the sermon and classes to emphasize that. I make myself accessible so that if a person is facing domestic violence issues, they can come and talk to me. Number two, I tell the community in general, and on a personal level, that it is extremely important to say that domestic violence is not acceptable, cannot be tolerated, and from the *Shari'ah* perspective is considered an injustice. So, I believe that my role is to empower people and make myself accessible and available.

3. What about your role in working against domestic violence when lecturing to other Muslim communities around the United States?

Another area that I emphasize is premarital counseling. This has become an area I'm known for in this community and around the U.S., because I believe that in order for us to prevent domestic violence, we have to educate people before they enter into a marriage contract.

Sometimes you would be surprised to hear people's responses when I bring up the issue of abuse. A person might say, "Why are you talking about it? Let us assume the best." I'll say, "I'm talking in general. Why are you becoming defensive?" I get that response when I'm just defining abuse, without saying someone is actually being abusive. In premarital counseling, I tell couples about emotional abuse, psychological abuse, and financial abuse. When I start explaining the concepts to them, some men become irritated. One time a person in premarital counseling told me, "You know, I wish you didn't mention these things. Now she might think I have mistreated her, and whatever I do she'll accuse me of abuse. As a Muslim, as an imam, you should not put that in the head of women. You should not have said that." Those were people who didn't grow up here. The young people who grow up here accept premarital counseling.

⁴ The term *haram* refers to behavior that is Islamically forbidden.

⁵ The term *Shari'ah* refers to divine law that is derived from the Qur'an.

In this community, we insist that even if a person is 60 years old, if they want to be married at ADAMS, they have to go through premarital counseling. Our premarital counseling program is six sessions for one hour each. We discuss domestic violence and talk about the signs of abuse. With the men present, we discuss what a woman should do if abuse happens. Some men get upset. But I find that young people are more open to it.

The other thing I see sometimes when I travel around the U.S. is that there is a disconnect between imams and professionals in the field. Many people look with suspicion at those who work in the field of domestic violence. They think they are in the business of breaking families. Therefore, when professionals from the field, social workers, and others, hear imams speak about domestic violence, they feel empowered. And sometimes it makes them challenge their own imams. Sometimes they invite me to speak.

I was invited to one community two months ago, and gave a training on domestic violence to a group of women from a Middle Eastern community. I asked them, "Why didn't you invite your own imam?" They said, "We would like to, but he was not supportive. We want you to talk so that he will realize that if he does not support our needs we will outsource and bring someone from outside to talk to us." When I met the imam after one of the prayers, he said, "Oh, I'm so glad that you're here at the *masjid* (mosque)." I brought up his unwillingness to talk to the women, and he said that the reason he didn't talk to the women about domestic violence was because of some men in the community. They told him that if he talks about the issue of domestic violence, he'd really be supporting a feminist ideology. But when I spoke to him he said, "Really? If that was the issue, that they were complaining about being beaten and physically abused, then the issue must be addressed." It definitely becomes shameful for him to not accept that these kinds of issues exist, at least in front of a colleague or another imam. Or to be seen as an imam who does not support people who are victimized by domestic violence.

The Islamic Society of North America, the Islamic Circle of North America, and other major organizations now invite me to speak on the issue of domestic violence. For some reason, some of the Muslim organizations and mosques feel safer if an imam comes to speak. They think that if a woman comes to speak, especially people from the domestic violence field, they may say something that is not mainstream for Muslims.

Therefore, one of the things that I do in my lecture is to mention the Peaceful Families Project. I always mention *rahimaha Allah*⁶ Sister Sharifa Alk-

⁶ *Rahimaha Allah* is the Arabic term for "blessings be upon her."

hateeb⁷ to show that I myself benefited from educational information related to domestic violence, and to show them that an imam should not pretend to know everything about family conflict. I may know the clear principles of justice and injustice, or of someone hitting another, but without domestic violence education I would not know the signs of domestic violence. For example, people definitely don't think financial abuse is a form of abuse, or that spiritual abuse is a form of abuse. Therefore, there is a lot of work to be done in this area, and I believe that every imam must learn the aspects of domestic violence. I also believe that every social worker in a *masjid* has to be empowered with the knowledge of basic domestic violence training so that they can be of help to people who come to them, rather than try to sometimes pass judgment, or use cultural approaches towards the issue. In my opinion, there should be a basic and standard response from those who help people experiencing domestic violence, including:

1. Safety for the person who is going through the abuse, especially if they experienced physical abuse.
2. Empowerment for the victim to tell them, "We are with you."
3. Offering help, counseling, guidance, and legal assistance to refer them to people who are available to help them.

If leaders in the community don't understand these three basic aspects and think people come before them just to complain, then the maximum they do for them is to say, "We feel sorry for you... *Haram*,⁸ you don't deserve it. Why did he do this to you?" But what happens next is very important.

4. Talk about your work with FaithTrust Institute as a Board Member.

I do believe that my work with FaithTrust Institute has changed my perspective on so many things. Actually it began with Sister Sharifa Alkhateeb. She was very persistent and insisted that I join the domestic violence movement. When she invited me to join FaithTrust Institute, I came to understand that domestic violence was not only an issue in the Muslim community, but that I could relate to my colleagues from other faiths - rabbis, ministers, and priests.

That commonality in itself helps when you talk about domestic violence in Muslim communities; to say, "Domestic violence is not only a problem in the

⁷ Sharifa Alkhateeb (1946-2004) was the founder of the Peaceful Families Project, and one of the pioneers of domestic violence advocacy in American Muslim communities.

⁸ In this context, the term *haram* translates as "how unfortunate."

Muslim community, but is a problem among all faith communities.” When you say that to Muslims, they don’t become defensive. Usually, Muslims think that Islam is being attacked and that everything is focused only on women, but when you say, “I was with a rabbi, minister, or a priest who said this and that about domestic violence,” then they say, “Ah, okay, he is coming from a broader perspective. He is not just one of those people blaming Islam and putting Muslims down.”

I tell people that domestic violence knows no agenda, in the sense that you have little boys being abused, elderly people being abused, men or women. But mainly domestic violence is against women, 95% against women.⁹ Domestic violence doesn’t know age, doesn’t know culture, doesn’t know religion, and doesn’t know economic status. When I say such things, then a person who is low-income, or a person who is rich, realizes that it is not just about them, it is about everybody.

When my work with FaithTrust Institute brought me to the national level, I participated in creating a national declaration against domestic violence for every faith.¹⁰ We worked on the declaration for some time, and it was very empowering because there were leaders of all religions saying, “Our texts have been misused to justify violence against women, and all of us are committed to ending domestic violence in our communities by interpreting our texts in a way that they cannot be misused.”

Therefore, I believe that addressing the issue of domestic violence in a collective manner, and an interfaith organization like FaithTrust Institute, helps a lot to empower people of faith who work in the field. They find bonding with one another, and they exchange experiences. I can tell you that I learned a lot from the Jewish community, as well as the Christian community, and how they address the issue of domestic violence. I learned how they are using their own religions to address the issue, and to empower people who have suffered from domestic violence.

5. Was there a turning point for you that provoked you to become an advocate?

In my own life I have seen distant female members of my family suffer from domestic violence. In one situation, when my relative turned to the court, the court did not grant her a divorce. For ten years the divorce just kept drag-

⁹ Editor’s Note: This statistic is from 1993. More recent statistics show that women account for 85% of victims of domestic violence. See www.endabuse.org.

¹⁰ The full text of this declaration can be found at www.faithtrustinstitute.org

ging, until our family finally helped her to leave Sudan. I have seen it, and I know what it looks like because I have seen women come into my mosque who suffer from the issue of domestic violence.

The turning point, really, was when Sister Sharifa Alkhateeb started telling me stories of women in the community, and referring women in the community to me. I became more aware of the level of domestic violence there was in the community, and felt that addressing domestic violence would require more than just a *fatwa*¹¹ or a counseling session. There had to be consistent work, constructive training for imams, empowerment of people who work in the field, finding resources within the community, removing abused women from their situations, guiding them step-by-step on how to become empowered, and even asking them to become future advocates for the issue of domestic violence prevention. That was really the turning point.

The other issue that bothered me so much was the number of calls that I received from shelters. Shelters would call me and say, "We have a woman here who does not speak English, and she is insisting on a particular diet."¹² We would like you to talk to her." If she spoke Arabic, I would speak to her in Arabic, and if she spoke Urdu, I would reach out to others in our community who work in the domestic violence field. These advocates have become very helpful.

I see the necessity and importance of recognizing that you'll be held accountable on the Day of Judgment¹³ if you don't help people who suffer from injustice. There's a *hadith* that scared me when I thought about it in terms of domestic violence, but when considering the community, it worried me to think about it from the perspective of accountability. Prophet Muhammad (*saws*)¹⁴ said, "Whoever sees a person who is being wronged and having an injustice committed against them, and does not help that person, then on the Day of Judgment the person can complain to Allah¹⁵ that the person saw them, could

¹¹ A *fatwa* is a religious ruling by an imam or scholar in response to a particular question or problem

¹² Islam prohibits the consumption of alcohol and pork products. In addition, some Muslims prefer to only eat meat that has been slaughtered according to Islamic law

¹³ Muslims believe that the end of this world will be marked by the "Day of Judgment," when the deeds of human beings will be judged by God, who will determine whether they will be sent to heaven or hell.

¹⁴ Muslims believe that Prophet Muhammad is the final messenger of God, and completes a long line of Prophets beginning with Adam and including Moses and Jesus. The term "*saws*," is the acronym for an Arabic term translated as "may peace be upon him."

¹⁵ In the Arabic language, the word for "God" is "Allah," and is used by all Muslims, as well as Arabic-speaking Christians.

have helped them, but did not.” Therefore, the issue of accountability has another dimension. Not only for the well-being of the community, but also for the spiritual dimension. There is accountability before God almighty, since God is all-Just and all-Merciful, and therefore expects us to act as such, to defend people who have been wronged, and to be kind and merciful towards them.

6. **In your work with Muslim communities, how common have you found domestic violence to be, why do you think it is happening, and what are some of the major contributing factors?**

For a long time Muslims tried to bury their head in the sand, and to say that domestic violence was not happening in their communities, but it is happening more often than you think. This week, for example, I talked to three women who suffered from domestic violence. We’re talking about just in the last week. Actually, one of them didn’t realize she was being abused. Her husband was taking the credit card from her and not allowing her to get what she needed. There was no physical abuse, but she didn’t realize that she was being abused emotionally, mentally, and financially. Some people don’t define domestic violence as anything but physical abuse.

If you include all the aspects of domestic violence, it is so common in the Muslim community that it is alarming. For example, there was a training I did for the ADAMS community in one of the nearby cities. Afterwards, the women came up to me and said, “We invited you because some members of our community are being beaten by men. But now that you have brought up all these other forms of abuse – we realize that almost all of us are experiencing some shape or form of domestic violence.” Therefore, it is extremely important for us to realize just how common domestic violence is in the Muslim community in order for us to be able to address the issue. It is very common, unfortunately.

Men who hit their wives try to provide justification for their abuse. They use a number of excuses for abuse such as:

1. “She provoked me,” or, “She is not listening,” or, “She has to understand her place,” or, “She brought it on herself,” or, “The religion says so, Islam says so, the verse is in the holy Qur’an, imam, what are you talking about? The Qur’an says beat the woman.”
2. “I did not abuse her, how can she call that abuse?” Meaning denial. The person does it and absolutely will not acknowledge that they have done it. “I wanted to discipline her so that she can be a model for her kids. She should not have done that, and therefore I wanted to tell my kids that even their mother can be punished if she does that.”
3. “I did it because of her social embarrassment to me. I want her to look good in the community; therefore, it’s better for us. I want us to resolve it

in the home so that next time, she will not do what she did in public.”

4. “She violated the law of Allah,” or, “She is not wearing *hijab*¹⁶,” or, “She’s talking to men.” All kinds of nonsense excuses.
5. The issue of in-laws: “She disrespected my mother and I wanted to show my mother that I really don’t care about my wife’s feelings over her feelings. My mother said that she did not get her food on time,” and so forth, and so on, “and I wanted to discipline my wife in front of my mother so that she would realize that I’m not favoring my wife over her.”
6. “She keeps repeating the same mistakes. I talked to her once, I said enough is enough for this issue of talking, and now it’s time for the stick.”
7. “She did not give me my rights to physical intimacy. Therefore I was frustrated, I was angry because she knows what I need, and she didn’t do that. Therefore, I hit her because I was not happy emotionally and physically.”
8. “I lost my job, and she knows that I’m in a bad situation. She should have understood my feelings as a man who has not been working. She should have known not to nag me or talk to me, and I warned her but she started talking to me anyway.” Similar excuses include either loss of a job, loss of money, business, and that kind of thing.

I have heard them all in the Muslim community, and none of them justify, none of them, zero, justify hitting someone. And that’s the message I would like to send to abusers in the community, “We know your excuses, we know what you might say, but none of those things, Islamically or morally will justify your behavior to hit another person.”

That is only in regards to physical abuse by the way. When it comes to the issue of emotional abuse, a woman may come and say, “My husband has not slept with me,” or, “He hasn’t had physical relations with me for one year.” In the case where the situation lasted for one year, I asked the husband, “Why are you depriving your wife from having intimate relations?” The husband said, “Islam says to separate from them in the bed,¹⁷ and the more I stayed away, I saw that there was no change in her behavior. Therefore, I just continued staying away, and then moved to another bedroom.” So I said, “Why don’t you

¹⁶ *Hijab* is an Arabic word that literally means a covering. It refers to the way that many Muslim women dress in public, and includes covering one’s hair and body with loose garments.

¹⁷ This is an example of using part of a Qur’anic verse out of context. The verse being referred to is 4:34, and it provides a multi-step process for husbands to address serious violations of the marriage. It is discussed in detail in Zainab Alwani’s chapter in this volume.

divorce her then?" He said, "If I divorce her, I'll be giving her what she wants, so I'll never give her that." Then the woman said, "I don't want to be divorced." So, the husband knew that his wife didn't want to be divorced and was ready to stay in that situation indefinitely. Even if the wife did want a divorce, he would not have given it to her as a way of punishing her. Either way, he becomes an abuser in that situation.

One of the issues I find very interesting is the issue of spiritual abuse. When it comes to the category of emotional and psychological abuse, I find that spiritual abuse is the most devastating form of abuse for many women who come to my office. They say that they are really scared of hellfire and really scared of punishment from God. They say, "I thought it's wrong to object to him," or, "I thought it was wrong to tell him not to talk to me like that," or, "He's been telling me that if I don't become intimate with him, the angels will curse me all night long,"¹⁸ or, "I have come to know that obedience is important because of the Qur'an and *Hadith* that my husband repeats to me, and therefore I do whatever he asks me." Sometimes, husbands may ask women to do things that are Islamically incorrect, especially in intimate relationships. In the domestic violence field, one of the forms of abuse is marital rape. Some of the Muslims in the community do not admit or realize that such behavior is happening in the Muslim community. Some don't even believe there's such a definition of something like that.

There are also a lot of indigenous Muslims who use Islam as an excuse for spiritual abuse. Some of the indigenous Muslim Americans, especially in the African-American community, also use polygamy as a form of spiritual abuse. Polygamy in the Muslim community is a form of abuse, in my opinion, when a man has two women living in a 2-bedroom or 1-bedroom apartment, and sometimes even has intimate relations in front of the other wife. Many Muslim men with multiple wives use the women against each other, so that the wives start abusing each other physically or verbally. It creates a sort of check and balance when the husband rewards one wife for hurting the other wife. The abuse does not come directly from the husband, but the husband accepts or allows it, or even helps the wives to abuse one another. Another form of religious or spiritual abuse is for a man to marry a woman without a marriage contract, have an intimate relationship, sometimes even children, but then walk away from her without fulfilling his obligation to her. I'm sorry to say that

¹⁸ This is a reference to a *hadith* that is often misused by men to manipulate their wives into having intimate relations; when misused, it is taken out of the broader teachings regarding marriage in which intimacy is for mutual pleasure and satisfaction.

there's a lot of abuse of religion, of Islam, in the Muslim community, when it comes to relationships.

In most cases of domestic violence that I have seen, people use religion to justify abuse. I suggest that Muslims address the issue of polygamy, especially in the inner cities, even by some imams. In many cases there is financial abuse, where women are working to pay for the rent while the husband is just providing a physical relationship. It's very important to empower women to not accept such behavior in the Muslim community. I call upon imams to take a stand on this issue, to explain that in Islam it is unacceptable, and that using Islam in that way will turn people away from Islam.

Some people have left Islam after they have seen how men use the religion to justify domestic violence. Not only that, last week I had a lady come to the office who had originally converted to Islam because she had been deceived by the activism and Islamic work of her husband. She showed me pictures of him destroying her apartment. He had not hit her, but he destroyed her apartment, and sent her emotionally and psychologically abusive emails. Her parents said, "Why would you become part of a religion that supports this?" Such people have been giving Islam a bad name, especially when taking advantage of people who revert to Islam. These men try to act holier than thou, and tell the women, "I'm a good Muslim." So the young ladies fall into the trap and marry those kinds of men.

Therefore, my advice to women converting to Islam is, "Do not marry the first man you see in the mosque. Do not get fooled by a person who says, "I'm a Muslim." The purity of a human being is not based on what they say. There is no completely holy and pure person. You need to go through premarital counseling. Do not immediately marry as soon as you come to Islam. You need to understand the religion well so that no one can religiously or spiritually abuse you and misinterpret Islam." I think the issue of abuse among young women who revert to Islam is one of the most important areas that is not usually addressed.

7. What types of domestic violence have you seen occur most often? In your experience, what effect has domestic violence had on families in Muslim communities?

Unfortunately, most of the time, imams only see the physical abuse. It is difficult for imams to detect domestic violence except when it's physical because physical abuse is more obvious, and they can see the bruises. I have seen a lot of physical abuse, but usually when it reaches the point of physical abuse, make no mistake about it, all other forms of abuse have already taken place. Women come to you after they have been completely emotionally exhausted.

When they are broken, and psychologically devastated, then they come to you, but that's after they have been physically hit.

Domestic violence has a great effect on the family. I have seen and counseled the children of abused spouses, and they possess some form of anger, or fear, or withdrawal, or shame, especially when domestic violence is a major issue in their homes. Their mothers may come and complain to me because the children start to have behavioral problems. Some of them even get into trouble with the law because they become resentful of the abuse in their homes, and want to express their resentment, so it becomes a backlash. The children might rebel in school, or sometimes even do illegal things, like sell drugs, even if they are not from a poor family. When they start selling drugs it's not because they really need the money, it's just to be rebellious, and to send a message to their parents by saying, "You hurt me, now I can hurt you back."

I have also seen double or triple abuse in the same house. What do I mean by this? A man abuses his wife, then the wife leaves the house or they get separated, then the man asks the son to discipline his mother, so the mother may get beaten by the son. One mother came to me bleeding because her husband had put it into her son's mind that he should beat her. In the same family, the daughter wants to get married, but to get back at the mother, the father refuses every young man that comes to the door. Even when the mother says, "Okay," the father says, "No," to make the mother upset. So the father was abusing the mother by preventing his daughter from getting married. It's just as if you throw a rock on water and see the effect of that, it gets wider, and wider, and wider. Honestly, it is very troubling to see it, and it breaks my heart sometimes when I see domestic violence situations. Some pregnant women, for example, have difficult pregnancies because they have been beaten and are crying all the time. Sometimes they even have their child prematurely, because of the beating, physical fear, and medical issues, resulting from the husband's abuse.

I can also tell you about the long-term impact of abuse on how young people view marriage. In marriage, we look to our parents as role models, and if our parents have good relationships then maybe we will also. Some young people are very brave by making sure that they do not repeat the mistakes of their parents. Many people make the choice to not repeat their parents' mistakes because they have gained an education on relationships outside of the family. For example, I know some people who attend Islamic courses and travel with other young people to attend Islamic events. They become aware of model relationships and determine not to repeat what their parents did. Young people who do not have that support system, and only have the model of an abusive home, tend to repeat the same mistakes, and the cycle will continue.

8. What role does Islamic scripture and the *Hadith* play to help work against domestic violence? What are some examples you use when you're trying to address abusive or domestic violence situations?

I always begin with defining marriage itself, so that people will recognize when it is not functioning like it should. I choose a verse from the holy Qur'an where Allah (*swt*)¹⁹ says, "And among His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves so that you may deal with them in tranquility, and Allah put love and mercy between your hearts. Verily in that are signs for those who reflect."²⁰ I use this verse as a model and example. I call it a frame of reference, or the core values of a marriage. If you define the core values and what marriage should look like, then people come to realize when it is not functioning that way. A successful marriage is like a friendship. Many times people sitting in the audience will say, "Oh, that's not what my marriage looks like. I can see that there's no *rahmah*, no kindness." When I refer to *rahmah*, it means that no one should abuse another verbally or physically. Then I talk about the meaning of love, and what is not love, and I talk about what *sakeenah*, or tranquility, means. After the lecture some people come to me and say, "I have a problem." Sometimes they start to cry, and I can immediately sense there is something wrong. What happens is the lecture turns on an alarm in them, and they become alert. It helps them see what Islam really says about marriage, and that they are not experiencing such a relationship.

Therefore, one aspect is to use a lot of verses from the Qur'an that describe the ideal concept of peaceful relationships. Then I talk about the perspective of the Qur'an regarding solving conflicts, and what Prophet Muhammad did when he had a problem with his spouse, like Aisha, or when his daughter Fatima had a problem with her husband Ali. When you talk about the model for resolving conflicts from the holy Qur'an, or from the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (*saws*), people realize that violence is not the way to solve conflicts. There's a lot of literature in that regard from the example of Prophet Muhammad and the holy Qur'an about the issue of resolving conflict.

The second aspect is to address passages in the Qur'an and *Hadith* that people usually misinterpret. For example, people might quote a *hadith* that appears to be degrading to women. Then a person will use that *hadith* to try to belittle, and emotionally and spiritually abuse their own spouse. But some of the *hadith* people quote are not authentic, or have been used out of context. Therefore, the purpose of the imam is to put things in perspective and to set

¹⁹ The acronym "*swt*" is a translation of an Arabic term meaning "be He glorified and exalted."

²⁰ Qur'anic verse 30:21.

the record straight, by translating, interpreting, and explaining those passages from the holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad. Imams must be able to say that those *hadith* are not authentic when people start quoting them, especially *hadith* that obviously contradict the idea of Prophet Muhammad being a mercy to mankind, and the concept of marriage being one full of love, and mercy, and tranquility. Imams must share that knowledge when someone comes and says, "Women should fulfill the desires of their husbands no matter what," or, "A woman should prostrate to her husband." Those types of things are troubling when they are quoted, and they need to be addressed.

9. When you learn of someone being abused, how do you assist them? Is there a system inside the mosque? A network that you use?

We use one of the local social services organizations called FAITH (Foundation for Appropriate and Immediate Temporary Help), but I also use one of the active members of the Peaceful Families Project, Salma Abugideiri,²¹ as a mental health therapist. I used to use Sister Sharifa Alkhateeb *rahimaha Allah*, and she would just talk to the women. *Subhan Allah*²² she was one of those people who had a garden of references in her head, and could, just off the top of her head, refer people to this community service or that family service.

When a woman is being abused, I support her decision to leave the house. Some husbands will continue to abuse their wives even when they are separated, by claiming that she is still his wife and he has rights over her. In such cases, we will issue a divorce, a religious divorce. That way we can tell the husband, "If you're going to try to abuse your wife by claiming your religious rights, they're gone." But making that point also brings a lot of heat to the imam. Some people will accuse him of destroying families, and so forth, but we have to do what is right, and from the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (*saws*). Therefore, we have to give abused women the religious support they need, including referrals to different kinds of social services. At ADAMS, we sometimes give women financial help by paying for food, rent, or those kinds of things.

²¹ Salma Elkadi Abugideiri is the Co-Director of the Peaceful Families Project, and a licensed, practicing mental health therapist.

²² The Arabic term *subhan Allah* can be translated as "Glory be to God."

10. How severe must the abuse be for you to encourage women to leave their home? Does it have to be physical, or if not physical, how do you decide?

When it is not physical, most of the time, the woman doesn't want to leave. She just wants you to fix her husband. I say, "I have to meet your husband first and see if he's fixable or not." Then I meet with the husband first, and ask Salma Abugideiri to help us most of the time by providing therapy. If I come to the conclusion that their relationship is not going to go anywhere, I tell them to their face that after learning all those things, "Now the decision is yours." In the case of non-physical abuse, we should also never make the decision for them, because in the end they may come back and say, "You told me to do this." Therefore, we tell them their options and choices.

In cases of physical abuse, we tell them, "You need to be safe. I'm advising you to be safe." For cases of emotional and spiritual abuse, I tell the woman that she's being abused, and she has to make a decision. If her husband acknowledges the abuse, and stops doing it, then change can take place through many counseling sessions. At the end of the day, it's the woman's decision, but we need to empower her to make a decision on her own. I try to take away the guilt trip women may experience from leaving their husbands, and the fear they may have from the cultural taboo of divorce. I say, "Islam allows divorce. There's nothing wrong with getting divorced." Therefore, I do everything that is necessary to help her. She gets all the emotional and religious support, and I tell her that ADAMS can help her financially. Then I leave it to her, and let her make her own decision.

11. What are the biggest challenges you see in Muslim communities that make it difficult to work against domestic violence?

1. Acknowledging the existence of domestic violence.
2. Many Muslims think that people who work on this issue have a grudge against men. Unfortunately some of them carry that grudge against survivors who become advocates. Such people suggest that advocates who are survivors have psychological problems, and are doing this to men because they are divorced and seeking revenge.
3. The fear that those working against domestic violence are radical feminist groups who are wrong and against Islam to begin with.
4. Some Muslims think that the imams who help abused people do not properly understand Islam's concept of keeping family first. They think that such imams have a misunderstanding about protecting and maintaining the family.

The definition of a family is not a woman and man living together, with the same last name and children. The word for family in Arabic is *usra*, meaning “to protect,” or a “strong shield.” If there’s no shield, then there’s no protection, and the person is exposed. Or like a garment,²³ as the Qur’an says. I tell people that if a garment has been pulled apart, or been subjected to heat, it will shrink and cannot be used anymore. Therefore, I tell them that we [imams and advocates] are not the ones who caused the situation to begin with.

12. What can be done to prevent domestic violence in Muslim communities by imams? Religious leaders? Community leaders? Community members? Youth?

1. It has to be known in every Muslim community that the imam and leadership have taken a stand and support women who are survivors or are experiencing domestic violence.
2. Religious teachings should be emphasized by using the podium and the *minbar*.²⁴ We should not accept or tolerate anyone who uses the *minbar* to degrade women, because it creates an abusive environment.
3. It is very important that the youth in Saturday and Sunday school are taught a curriculum of love, caring, and respect for members of their family.
4. Women’s *halaqas*²⁵ and classes in the mosque should be used as a platform for empowering women to know their rights.
5. Mosques should provide financial assistance and other forms of help to women who are being abused, even if they are wives of members of the mosque Board. The mosque should not treat the issue of domestic violence according to who is in power in the mosque, or who is making more money. That should not be regarded as a criterion for helping women. We need to look to the Islamic concept of justice so that we can stand for justice, even if it is against our own selves.²⁶

²³ Qur’anic verse 2:187.

²⁴ *Minbar* is the Arabic word for “pulpit.”

²⁵ *Halaqa* is the Arabic word for “study circle.”

²⁶ Qur’anic verse 4:135 emphasizes standing for justice.

6. I believe that domestic violence survivors should address Muslim communities in different forums. Speaking about their own experiences will provide the community with a reality check regarding the state of their communities.
7. We should counsel the children of domestic violence survivors and provide a loving environment for them in the community, so that they feel supported.
8. The imams in each area should sign and post a declaration against domestic violence, so that they can collectively empower one another.
9. Muslims should understand that law enforcement and the people who enforce domestic violence laws are equally as important as the imam. The imam doesn't have legal authority, so there's no shame in calling the police to rescue someone.
10. Writing a book like you're doing now.

A LEGAL GUIDE TO MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE FOR THE AMERICAN MUSLIM WOMAN

By Marwa Zeini, Esq.

INTRODUCTION

Many women do not understand the law. This is especially true of Muslim women who are dealing with two different systems of law and who are not trained to navigate both systems. I hope through this essay to be able to shed some light on the Islamic law system, the American law system and how an American Muslim woman can reconcile both systems of law. This is a very short summary of what is a diverse and varied body of law. It touches upon issues which I think a Muslim woman should be aware of. It is not by any means a comprehensive or scholarly study of the Islamic or American law. The suggestions in this essay are not intended to be legal advice. Instead, this should be used as a template for American Muslim women to discuss the various issues with their legal and religious advisors.

PROTECTION OF WOMEN UNDER THE ISLAMIC LAW SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION TO THE ISLAMIC LAW SYSTEM

When we are talking about the Islamic law system, we are talking about rules and regulations that Muslim jurists formulated over 1400 years of Islamic history. These rules are influenced by societal norms, the jurists' experience, the jurists' interpretation of the laws set out in the Qur'an, and interpretations of rulings issued by the jurists' predecessors. As with any judicial system, these rules have precedent but are not set in stone. Only a few of the rules are set out in the Qur'an.

Over the years, some jurists were prominent enough to create schools of thought or *mathahib*. Currently there are five major schools of thought: Hanafi, Hanbali, Shafi', Maliki and Ja'fari. In the discussions below, we will use these schools of thought as the basis of Islamic law. It must be understood, however, that these schools are theoretical. In practical terms, most Muslim countries use the above schools as a guide to Islamic laws but also add other requirements from colonial law systems or from their own traditions and customs.

WOMEN UNDER THE ISLAMIC LAW SYSTEM

Under traditional Muslim society, a woman lived in an agrarian or nomadic society. Under this society men were required to support and protect women at all

stages of life. Whether women were daughters, wives or mothers they were taken care of by their male relatives. This is the underlying principal that is found in Islamic law. Despite that, women were also given financial independence and abilities to earn their living. Below, we will discuss some of the aspects of Islamic law that deal with women and the family.

VALID MARRIAGE

In order to have a valid Islamic marriage under most schools of thought, the following conditions must be met:

- a) The bride or her guardian, with her consent, makes an offer of marriage to the groom.
- b) The groom accepts the marriage.
- c) A *mahr* or marital gift is given or promised to the bride.
- d) At least two witnesses must be present.

First, under Islamic law, marriage is considered a contract between the husband and wife. Therefore, either party may put conditions in the marriage contract. There is some discussion among Muslim jurists as to what conditions are valid. However, in the past, women have used this theory to limit a husband's ability to marry other wives, to allow the wife to divorce without going to court, to allow the wife to live in a particular city or to ensure that the wife can work outside the home. The contract can also be used to determine property rights, distribution rights and rights upon divorce. If the contract is violated, the aggrieved party may seek a divorce.

Second, under most schools of thought, if a bride has not been married before, then her guardian or *wali* has to give his permission for the marriage. The Hanafi's say that a bride does not need the guardian's permission for the marriage, and that she is able to contract for marriage herself. In a society where there was no police power, and where the interest of women was protected by her male relatives, the guardian requirement allowed a woman to have the male muscle to guard her rights. It was thought that if the woman did not have the support of a guardian, then the husband would be able to take advantage of that situation, and she would be powerless in the marriage. Even in society today, it is known that abusers generally try to alienate their victims from family and friends in order to initiate and continue their abuse. Also, because marriages were conducted at a younger age, it was thought that a woman did not have the life experience to be able to negotiate her marriage contract and safeguard her interest. Therefore, if a woman has been married before, most schools of thought do not require the woman to have a guardian, but the woman may still elect to do so.

The requirement for two witnesses again protects the parties and prevents one party from denying the marriage. Some Muslim countries have extended this

protection by requiring that all marriages must be recorded with governmental agencies in order to be valid.

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

Although under the Islamic system a woman is not required by law to support herself and can sue her male relatives for support, Islamic law also insures her financial independence at different stages of life.

Mahr

Mahr is a requirement for a valid marriage under Islamic law mentioned in the Qur'an (4:20). *Mahr* is a marital gift the husband gives to the wife upon marriage. If it is not given immediately upon marriage, then it is considered a debt the husband has to pay to the wife. The *mahr* can be anything from a piece of fruit to multi-million dollar property and is determined by the parties, although some schools of thought have set a minimum floor for *mahr*. The *mahr* is the wife's sole property which she can save, spend, gift, bequeath and/or invest. The payment of the *mahr* can take different forms:

- a) It can be due and payable immediately upon marriage.
- b) It can be deferred with a certain time limit for payment, for example the *mahr* will be \$100,000 with \$50,000 due upon marriage and \$50,000 in one year.
- c) It can be deferred without a certain time limit for payment, for example the *mahr* will be \$100,000 with \$50,000 due upon marriage and \$50,000 upon the husbands' death or divorce.

Depending on how it is set up, the *mahr* can be a good tool to give the wife financial independence during the marriage and in the event the marriage ends. In theory, it also gives the wife the ability to leave the marriage.

Inheritance

Although Islamic laws were established 1400 years ago, the laws gave women the right to inherit from relatives in a historical context that gave women no rights (Qur'an 4:7, 4:11-12 and 4:176). Certain shares are set for wives, mothers, daughters and other female relatives depending upon the composition of the family unit. The details of such laws are too complex for this article. However, in looking at these laws, we again must take the underlying assumption into consideration that women are never required to support themselves under Islamic law, while men are always required to support their female relatives.

Separate Property

Under Islamic law the property belongs to the person who holds the title – that is if your name is on the title to a car, the deed on a house or the receipt of a chair,

you own it. This remains the case even if the person gets married. There is no concept of marital property. For a married couple, it is sometimes hard to determine who owns the property. At that point, general custom is taken into account. For example, in a fishing town, where women are homemakers, custom may hold that fishing equipment belongs to the husband; household appliances belong to the wife, unless there is evidence to the contrary. Again custom changes by region, by town, sometimes even by tribe. Therefore in these situations, it is up to the jurist looking at the issue to make the determination.

If a woman works, her income is hers to keep, and she is, under most circumstances, still entitled to support from the male members of her family. As in most societies, married couples jointly decide whether a woman will work outside the home. If the wife worked before marriage or she reserves the right to work in her marriage contract, then the husband is required to provide financial maintenance to his wife. Essentially, if she decides to work, she is entitled to save the money that she earns. This gives a woman real choice as to whether or not to stay home, look after children, pursue volunteer work, or become a career woman. If, on the other hand, upon marriage the husband is ignorant of her previous work status, or the wife has agreed not to work and then changes her mind after marriage, then the wife may forfeit her right to maintenance by the husband. Financial maintenance is a point that should be addressed before the marriage.

RIGHT TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND DIVORCE FOR CASES THROUGH THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Divorce laws under Islamic law are complex, and the schools of thought vary greatly as to when a divorce is valid. We will summarize some aspects of divorce law but will not go into great detail.

There are three ways to get a "divorce" under Islamic law:

1. *Talaq* (Arabic for repudiation of marriage or divorce) - under this method, the husband (or wife if she reserved that power for herself in the marriage contract) says the word "*Talaq*." This starts a three menstrual-month waiting period to determine whether the wife is pregnant (in the case of a pregnant woman the waiting period ends when her pregnancy ends) and gives the person initiating the divorce time to reconsider the decision before it is final. Because this process is disturbing to the family, it is limited to two times. If the party initiates the divorce for a third time, then the divorce is final immediately and the parties cannot get back together without the wife first entering into a bona fide marriage which then ends.
2. *Khul'* (Arabic for divestiture or self-redemption) - this is usually initiated by the wife, who negotiates a settlement agreement with the husband so that he will give her a divorce. It usually involves the wife giving back

some or all of the gifts that her husband has given her including the *mahr*.

3. Judge Determined – this can be initiated by either party, in front of an Islamic judge or jurist, who listens to the arguments made by both sides and determines the rights and responsibilities of the parties and issues a court divorce.

The wife is entitled to support (food, clothing and housing) during her waiting period, but she is no longer the responsibility of the husband after a divorce is finalized.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT BY MALE MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY THROUGH JUDICIAL CHANNELS

As previously stated, a Muslim woman at every stage of her life is supported by family members (4:34).¹ Fathers are required to support daughters until marriage. Husbands are required to support wives, unless agreed to otherwise by the marriage contract. If a wife is divorced, she returns to her father for support, unless the terms of the divorce state otherwise. If the father is unable to support the daughter, then her son, grandfather, brothers, uncles, nephews or other male members of the family are required to support her. If she does not have male relatives, then the Islamic state is required to support her. This right to support can be enforced through the Islamic court system. Besides providing financial support, these males are also required to provide protection for the women. Again, in a society where there was no police, it was important to have male muscle behind a woman in order to ensure her safety and protection.

CHILD CUSTODY AND SUPPORT

The consensus of the Islamic jurists is that the wife is responsible for child rearing (Qur'an 2:232-233 and Bakhtiar 1996). As such, custody of the children is the right of the mother. There is a difference of opinion in the schools of thought as to the period of such custody. Usually the period of custody is determined by the age of the child. The shortest period holds that custody ceases when a child reaches two years old. The most flexible holds that the child stays with the mother until he or she can choose which parent they want to live with. The above are the default rules; if a dispute occurs, an Islamic court would evaluate the circumstances, take into

¹ Qur'anic verse 4:34 states that, "*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means....*"

account the school of thought the parties are following and determine custody based on the best interest of the child.

The medical expenses for pregnancy are to be paid by the father of the child. The mother is entitled to a custody fee for custodial services (rearing and upbringing of the child), and if the mother is breast-feeding the child she is also entitled to a breastfeeding fee. These fees are paid out of the child's assets if the child has any assets, if not, then by the father of the child.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence has been a contentious issue in the Islamic community. It is beyond this essay to discuss this subject in great detail.² However, a brief overview of the main points is warranted.

Much of the controversy lies in the interpretation of the Qur'anic verse 4:34:

... So virtuous women are those who are obedient (to Allah) and guard (their own chastity as well as the rights and secrets of their husbands even) in (their) absence, as Allah has guarded (the women's rights). As for those women (on whose part) you apprehend disobedience and bad behavior, you may admonish them (first lovingly) and (then) refuse to share their beds with them and (as a last resort) punish them (mildly). If they, then obey, you shall seek no other way against them. Indeed Allah alone is High, (and) Great.

Those who want to justify committing domestic violence have used this verse in the Qur'an to do so. However, this verse actually limited a pervasive practice of beating at the inception of Islam. The verse limits the circumstances under which a husband can punish his wife (only for disobedience and bad behavior in the context of breaking the marriage contract). The verse also makes it a last resort after admonishing the wife and leaving the marital bed. Therefore the punishment cannot be in anger. The punishment contemplated by the verse according to some jurists is that of hitting lightly with a toothbrush or handkerchief. The wife may not be hit on her face, and the hit cannot cause any physical bruising or marking. If the rules are violated, then the wife can seek a cause for divorce from the courts and can ask for restitution from her husband.

From the above discussion, it is clear that Islamic law does not condone domestic violence and has in fact limited violence in the marital relationship.

² For an excellent discussion on the subject of domestic violence please refer to Azizah al-Hibri's *An Islamic Perspective on Domestic Violence*.

PROTECTION OF WOMEN UNDER THE AMERICAN LAW SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to generalize about women's rights and obligations under the American family law system. First, we have to deal with different laws in each of the states as well as the federal system. But setting these differences aside, there are various general principals that are found in most of the states.

In order to understand women's rights in America, a short historical review is warranted. The founding of the United States saw the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the ratification of the Constitution by the thirteen states then existing. However, the principals of equality, liberty and property granted by these documents did not apply to the women of the time. Women did not have the right to vote in most states, did not have the right to own their own property, and in general did not work outside the home.

In 1920 women were finally granted the right to vote by the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution. It was not until the 1960's that sexual discrimination was prohibited in the workplace by the passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1963, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This, along with various Supreme Court decisions³ in the 1970's holding that sex discrimination was a violation of equal protection, gave women the ability and right to be gainfully employed.

Another change that occurred in the 1970's was the adoption by many states of the no-fault divorce laws. These laws made divorces easier to obtain and no longer punished a spouse for being the "guilty" party. The no-fault divorce laws also changed the laws of distribution of property, spousal support and custody. It was no longer a gender tilted system where women were looked upon as the supported party, and awarded custody of the children; but instead, neutral factors were used to determine whether or not one spouse would support another, who would get custody based on the best interest of the child and property distribution based on contribution to the marriage.

The above changes have, in some ways, enhanced the rights of women by allowing them to support themselves and not become dependent on their spouses for financial support. On the other hand, women often become single parents who are trying to support their children and run after the father for child support, while at the same time being left with all the child rearing responsibility.

³ See: *Reed v. Reed*, 404 U.S. 71 (1971) and *Craig v. Boren*, 429 U.S. 190 (1976).

MARRIAGE

Getting Married

In the United States, the states determine marriage laws. Most states prohibit marriages by consanguinity (blood relationships such as parent-child, brother-sister, uncle-niece, aunt-nephew, etc.). The states establish the minimum age for marriage, with some requiring parental consent for persons under the minimum age. States have also restricted bigamy and polygamy by imposing both criminal and civil penalties.

For a valid marriage most states require a marriage license be obtained by the couple before the marriage ceremony is conducted. In a small number of states, common-law marriages are still recognized – these require the couple to have a present verbal agreement of marriage between them, cohabitate together, and publicly present themselves as husband and wife.

Prenuptial and Postnuptial Agreements

A prenuptial agreement (also called “antenuptial agreement” or “premarital agreement”) is an agreement entered into by a man and woman before their marriage and in contemplation of their marriage. A postnuptial agreement is an agreement entered by a husband and wife during their marriage. Both types of agreements determine certain aspects of the financial relationship of the couple including property rights, spousal support, inheritance rights, and which laws will be applied in the event of a divorce.

The traditional view of prenuptial and postnuptial agreements was that they were unenforceable because they were against public policy. The courts originally thought that these agreements would encourage divorce by making it easier. Also, courts thought that these agreements might be inherently unfair because the parties were not dealing with each other at arms length and were emotionally involved, and because the agreements dealt with issues to be addressed in the future where circumstances were likely to change. Courts therefore closely scrutinized these types of agreements.

However, increasingly, courts are now recognizing prenuptial and postnuptial agreements and have set certain criteria that must be followed in order for the agreements to be valid:

- a) The parties in most states cannot pre-determine by agreement child support or child custody. The states view child support as the right of a child, which the parents cannot waive on the child's behalf. As to child custody, the state wants the child's best interest, and that may not be what has been agreed to by the parents before their marriage even took place.
- b) Agreement must be in writing to comply with the statute of frauds.

- c) Both spouses have to have all the relevant information to make an informed decision as to whether to sign the agreement. This is called full disclosure by the parties.
- d) Both parties must enter into the agreement voluntarily, which means that no duress or fraud is present. If the agreement is reviewed by an independent attorney before it is entered into, that is usually considered voluntary.
- e) Some courts require that the provisions of the agreement are fair and reasonable under the circumstances being evaluated. This is evaluated based on the parties' respective wealth, ages, intelligence, literacy, business know-how, and prior family ties or commitments.
- f) Under contract principals and following the above rules, any agreement can be made as long as it does not violate public policy.

Financial Position of Married Women

In the U.S., there are two marital property systems. We will define and briefly discuss both systems below:

- a) Common law property. Under this system, the property belonged to the spouse who acquired it. Property could be acquired either through inheritance, earnings, capital gains or any other legitimate legal acquisition.
- b) Community property. This system is predominant in Arizona, California, Idaho, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin. This system treats the marriage as a partnership with, for the most part, each of the spouses owning 50% of the assets acquired during the marriage by either spouse.

A married woman needs to know her state's property laws. If she moves between states, she needs to keep track of which property is owned under which system. These property designations have multiple legal implications including determination of property rights between the spouses and which properties are going to be passed on to heirs after a woman's death.

DIVORCE, CHILD CUSTODY AND SUPPORT ISSUES

Divorce Law

Divorce laws have evolved over the last century. Most states now have some version of a no-fault divorce. That means that the courts do not determine the "fault" of the parties and do not take the wrongful acts of a spouse into consideration when determining asset distribution, spousal support, custody or child support.

Some states still retain the fault-based system alongside the no-fault divorce system. The states allow grounds to be argued by the party including cruelty, adultery, desertion or abandonment, habitual drunkenness or drug addiction, incurable impotence, failure to support, criminal conviction or insanity. In these states, fault is used to determine marital property distributions and spousal support.

Asset Distribution

Asset distribution is based on the system of property ownership in the state. For common law states, if there is no agreement between the parties providing otherwise, "equitable distribution" is used. Equitable distribution uses various factors to determine the fair distribution of property, including the economic circumstances of the spouses at the time of divorce, duration of marriage, each spouses' contribution to the marriage and the value of each spouses' separate property. Any property acquired by either spouse before marriage is considered "non-marital property" and is not subject to equitable distribution. Any property acquired by either spouse during the marriage is considered "marital property," and is subject to equitable distribution.

For community property states, property acquired during marriage is already divided upon acquisition.

Spousal Support

Spousal support is money ordered by a court of law proceeding payable from the earnings of one spouse to the other spouse. The support is sometimes called maintenance or alimony. Courts have recognized various types of spousal support. Some of those are:

- a) Temporary - this is usually obtained during the divorce proceedings.
- b) Permanent - this is rarely awarded by the courts. Two circumstances where this might be used would be (a) in a long-term marriage where one spouse is the homemaker, has no skills and is unable to gain any skills to support him or herself and (b) where one spouse is disabled and therefore unable to support him or herself.
- c) Rehabilitative – this is a limited form of support to allow a spouse to gain education/ skills to be able to support him or herself.
- d) Reimbursement – this deals with the situation in which one spouse supported another through training, education or professional program during the marriage. That spouse is, in essence, being reimbursed for this support whether such support was monetary or non-monetary.

Spousal support can be modified if the circumstances of the parties change. Spousal support ends upon remarriage of the supported spouse or the death of either spouse.

Child Custody and Support

Custody is usually a contentious issue in most divorces. Most states and courts now provide for a number of factors to determine who should be the custodial parent and whether the non-custodial parent is entitled to visitation. The courts may consider factors such as:

- a) The best interest of the child
- b) The primary caretaker of the child
- c) Fitness of the parents, including criminal history and sexual behavior
- d) The wealth of each parent
- e) Domestic violence by one parent against the other and child abuse allegations
- f) Careers of the parent
- g) Daycare arrangements of the parents
- h) Which parent will allow the child to have frequent contact with the other parent
- i) The disabilities of the parents

Some states have divided the custody issue into two parts: physical or residential custody on the one hand, and legal custody or parental responsibility on the other. In general, courts want both parents of the child to be involved in the child's life and make decisions regarding the child and therefore award joint legal custody or parental responsibility to both parents if possible. Physical or residential custody refers to where the child is physically residing. Again, the courts in general want as much contact between the non-residential parent through liberal visitation rights, overnight visits, and weekend and holiday schedules.

Child support is considered a right of the child, and both parents are required to provide such support. Again, states differ on how they calculate child support. Factors such as the financial resources of the parents, the standard of living of the family prior to the divorce and the physical, mental, and educational need of the child are considered by the courts. Some states have set up a formula or table which calculates child support based on the parents income and allows the courts to adjust it up or down depending on the above factors.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

When a woman is faced with an abuser, various options should be considered. Ideally, she should get law enforcement involved. In most states, law enforcement officers will remove the abuser from the house and detain him for 24 hours or longer. This gives the victim a chance to seek help from the courts. However, law

enforcement agencies do vary, with some more responsive to domestic violence than others. A woman should identify community resources that help domestic violence victims. Some of these community resources provide legal advice and representation, shelters for abused women and help in gaining skills and finding a job.

Each of the states has its own legal definition of what constitutes domestic violence. All states have provisions for a victim to get a protective order from the court to prevent the abuser from coming near the victim's home or place of work. States also sometimes temporarily determine custody issues and support issues through these protective orders.

Domestic violence is also a crime in most jurisdictions. The criminal definition might be different from the civil definition used in family law courts and in issuing the protective orders.

CONFLICT OF LAWS — BETWEEN STATES AND COUNTRIES

With each state having its own property, marriage, divorce, custody and support laws and the mobility of the parties, it is obvious that conflicts would arise. There have been some efforts by the states and Congress⁴ to try to address some of these issues. These efforts have been somewhat successful in determining which courts have jurisdiction in cases and resolving some of the problems involved with competing court and state jurisdictions. Courts will also, in most cases, enforce orders and judgment from other jurisdictions.

One problem that has gained substantial media attention in the United States is international kidnapping. The Hague Convention on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction has been adopted by approximately 40 countries, including the United States. It provides that a child under the age of 16 who has been kidnapped has to be returned to the country of habitual residence, and that the new country cannot determine any custody disputes. However, only a small number of countries have signed on to this treaty, and it cannot be enforced against non-signatory countries. Congress has also addressed this issue through the International Parental Kidnapping Crime Act (IPKCA).⁵ The act makes kidnapping a child, and taking the child to another country, a federal felony punishable by fine and/or up to 3 years of imprisonment. There is no statute of limitation during the life of the child.⁶

⁴ Efforts have produced: The Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act (UCCJA) 9 U.L.A. 115 (1988), Parental Kidnapping Prevention Act (PKPA) of 1980, 28 U.S.C. §1738A (2000) and the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA), U.L.A. (pt. 1a) 657 (1999 & Supp. 2002).

⁵ See: 18 U.S.C. §1204 (2000).

⁶ See: 18 U.S.C. §3283 (2004).

In 1992, the regulations for issuing passports for children were changed to prevent international kidnapping. The U.S. State Department now requires, under most circumstances, that both parents of a minor under the age of 14 sign an application for a passport. A parent involved in a child custody dispute may also ask the U.S. Department of State to enter their child into the Children's Passport Issuance Alert Program. The State Department will then notify the parent before issuing a U.S. Passport for a minor child under the age of 18. Those tools, although useful, do not prevent a child from leaving the country if he or she already has a U.S. or foreign passport.

RECONCILING THE TWO SYSTEMS

EDUCATING WOMEN AS TO ISLAMIC RIGHTS, LEGAL RIGHTS AND WAYS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES

The first step is for American Muslim women to understand what their rights are. It is also important that those she deals with in the Islamic community and in her family understand the laws under which they live.

A basic understanding of the laws of the state they live in is required for American Muslim women. Ultimately the states are the ones that will be enforcing whatever agreement or laws are applicable.

One resource for women regarding American law is the local bar association. Most bar associations can provide information as to the basic laws of the states. Sometimes they publish pamphlets written for the general public explaining the laws. They may also recommend books or other resources for legal information.

Of course, for specific legal guidance an attorney would be needed. American Muslim women should choose an attorney who has dealt with different cultures, who is experienced in the law and who is able and willing to help them comply with Islamic and American Law.

Finding resources for Islamic law is sometimes difficult. Again, the laws discussed above were formulated for a Muslim society which is applying Islamic law. Even then, these laws were formulated centuries ago under very different circumstances than those encountered by most Muslim women today. One of the major problems with Islamic law is that there is no real authority that is binding on all Muslims, like the Pope, for example, in Catholicism. That means that different jurists or scholars will give different advice, and it is often difficult for a Muslim to know which opinion he or she should follow.

However, there are now attempts by Muslims living in America to review and issue guidance on issues of concern. The Fiqh Council of North America is one

such step in the right direction.⁷ In the future we hope that the resources regarding Islamic laws are more accessible to, and customized for, Muslims living in America.

EDUCATING COMMUNITY AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO BETTER ADVISE MUSLIM WOMEN

Religious leaders play a major role in the Muslim community. They are often the first people consulted when a problem arises. Most small communities in America have imams that come from diverse cultures. Although there is a growing segment of religious leaders who are home-grown, their number is still small. Therefore, in a lot of instances the religious leaders do not know American law. Even in preparing imams in the U.S., only religious education is stressed. A basic understanding of American law is a must before an imam or religious leader can give advice to Muslims.

Attorneys' and women's advocates should also partner with religious leaders in order to coordinate resources and exchange information. The religious leaders have the forum, through Friday prayers, lectures and religious classes, to educate the whole community regarding their rights and obligations under Islamic laws. They can also actively participate in educating the community on how to live an Islamic life under the American legal system.

Religious leaders and prominent members of the community should encourage the youth to go into the legal profession and law enforcement fields so that American Muslims will have the help of those who are well-versed in both American and Islamic laws.

EDUCATING THE AMERICAN JUDICIARY REGARDING THE PARTICULARITIES OF CULTURE AND RELIGION

It is the obligation of American Muslims to educate judges, attorneys, law enforcement officers and other officials who routinely help Muslims and make decisions regarding Muslims on cultural and religious issues unique to them. This should be part of the sensitivity and cultural training of the judiciary. Muslims should approach this project as an information exchange so that such officials have an idea as to the issues of concern when dealing with Muslims. It must be understood however, that Muslims come from different backgrounds and therefore, overgeneralizations should be avoided.

⁷ To view some of the opinions of the Fiqh Council of North America, and more, see: <http://www.fiqhcouncil.org>.

HOW AMERICAN MUSLIM WOMEN CAN PROTECT THEMSELVES

Islamic law was one of the first systems to ensure that women's rights were codified by law and enforced by the judiciary. Islamic law requires Muslims to comply with the laws of the communities that they live under, so long as those laws do not contradict a known, universal and unequivocal Islamic law or principle. Therefore, it is important that Muslims in general, and Muslim women in particular, know and follow the laws of the state they live in. That does not mean that they cannot also follow Islamic law. The two systems are not mutually exclusive. In fact, a savvy American Muslim woman should be able to comply with Islamic law and do so in such a way that the American legal system will enforce her rights.

An American Muslim woman should never accept a religious marriage without first obtaining a valid state license and recording such a marriage in the appropriate court. This prerequisite is necessary because a religious divorce does not grant the woman any rights. Since the purpose of Islamic marriage and divorce laws is to guarantee women's rights, it is my opinion that it is a religious requirement for all Muslim marriages in the United States to be registered. That is the only way to fulfill the purpose of the Islamic marriage and divorce system.

Agreeing to become a second, third or fourth wife is never a good idea in the U.S. Bigamy and polygamy are prohibited by every state and are criminal offenses. The woman is therefore subjecting herself to criminal prosecution. Furthermore, the woman does not have the rights of a married woman under the American system and cannot enforce her Islamic marital contract or any other right with regards to property or inheritance. And finally, no one in the United States would have the power to divorce her from her husband since only the court system in the U.S. is given the power to dissolve marriages.

Prenuptial Agreements

In our discussions of marriages and divorces, inheritance and financial independence, and other issues, we stated the "default" laws of both Islamic and American systems. These are the laws that are in effect if there is no other agreement by the parties. Therefore, an Islamic prenuptial agreement which determines the parties' rights and obligations with respect to property ownership, distribution, inheritance, and support, and which complies with the State's laws for prenuptial agreements is the best option. In fact, it should be standard practice by our Islamic institutions that perform marriages to require such a contract. To best protect the woman's interests, an attorney should draft this Islamic prenuptial agreement.

Use of American Police Enforcement and Court Systems

An American Muslim woman should be encouraged to enforce her rights under the law through the American police and court system. She should understand that she might have to educate the officials with regards to cultural and religious issues involved in the case. Furthermore, communities and religious leaders should support a woman who uses the court system and provide her with the resources she needs to enforce her rights. If the woman is in a domestic violence situation, the community should provide the resources to protect her and guide her through the court process.

Divorce and Consequences

In the event of a divorce that is initiated in the U.S., only those documents issued by a court in the U.S. are considered valid. If the couple have a valid marriage and also have Islamic marriage documents, courts are willing to listen to arguments regarding their rights and responsibilities under Islamic law. They may consider the Islamic marriage document a prenuptial agreement. If there is a dispute regarding Islamic law, religious leaders should be used as expert witnesses in the divorce proceedings. Ultimately, a judge will have to make a determination based on the evidence presented.

Domestic Violence

It is the responsibility of our community to protect women from domestic violence. Women should not be told by members of the community to tolerate domestic violence. Instead, a Muslim woman should educate herself as to what resources are available in the event of a domestic violence incident. She should take advantage of the Islamic rules regarding *mahr* and earnings to remain financially independent. Similarly, Islamic centers need to partner with domestic violence organizations and shelters and educate their congregations regarding the dangers of domestic violence.

CONCLUSION

As the saying goes – knowledge is power. In order for American Muslim women to be empowered, they need to be educated on their legal rights and how they can enforce them. Again the above was only a brief overview of very complex laws and should only be used as a starting point in any American Muslim woman's journey to understanding American law and Islamic law.

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THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The history of the United States of America is a story of growth and change. From the first settlers to the present day, the nation has evolved through various stages of development. The early years were marked by exploration and settlement, followed by a period of rapid expansion and industrialization. The American Revolution and the Civil War were pivotal moments in the nation's history, shaping its identity and values. The 20th century brought significant social and political changes, including the rise of the American Dream and the challenges of the Cold War. Today, the United States continues to be a dynamic and influential nation, facing new challenges and opportunities in the global world.

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The American Revolution was a period of significant change and growth for the young nation. It began with the Declaration of Independence in 1776, which declared the colonies' independence from Great Britain. The war that followed was a struggle for freedom and self-determination. The revolution led to the adoption of the Constitution in 1787, which established the framework for the federal government. The American Revolution was a defining moment in the nation's history, shaping its identity and values.

THE CIVIL WAR

The Civil War was a period of significant change and growth for the young nation. It began with the secession of the Southern states in 1861, leading to a four-year conflict. The war was fought over the issue of slavery and the preservation of the Union. The Civil War resulted in the abolition of slavery and the strengthening of the federal government. The war was a defining moment in the nation's history, shaping its identity and values.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

The American Dream is a concept that represents the idea of achieving success and prosperity through hard work and determination. It is a central theme in American history and culture. The American Dream has inspired generations of Americans to pursue their dreams and build a better life for themselves and their families. The American Dream is a defining moment in the nation's history, shaping its identity and values.

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

By Sarah Kamal

Women and children are often in great danger in the place where they should be safest: within their families.

-- Mehr Khan, Director (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2000: 1)

Afghan women occupy a curious space in global politics. Years of fear and suffering under the repressive Taliban regime have followed years of being targets of war crimes during the *Mujaheddin* civil war, and being used as an unwilling centerpiece in sweeping Communist government reforms in the late 1970s. Exoticized, defaced, displaced, widowed, crippled, broken, and victimized, Afghan women have served as an emblem of clan and national honor as well as a symbol of oppression, justifying rallying cries for wars of protection, revenge, and liberation through two decades of armed conflict in Afghanistan.

The many forms of violence Afghan women have faced have been extreme and unforgiving. Child marriage, trafficking and bonded labor, kidnapping by armed groups, landmines, mobility restrictions, stonings and executions, forced veiling under the all-enveloping *burqa*, and exclusion from the world of work have been inescapable realities. More mundane types of violence Afghan women have faced away from the outside world, however, where danger has been at the hands of intimate partners and members of the extended family, while also endemic, is only gradually gaining more attention, documentation, and understanding.

Recent media campaigns on violence against women have emerged to advocate for changes in Afghan society and promote a shift in public understanding of the problem. Such media interventions have had to tread a careful line, however, as Afghan women and family honor are imbued with extreme cultural sensitivity. The instability of Afghanistan's transition has further underscored the need to avoid controversy in the volatile post-conflict environment.

This article presents a brief treatment of post-conflict Afghanistan and some communications tactics that have begun to carefully, and to some extent indirectly, address domestic violence in the country. I will present a case study of a media initiative carried out in 2005 by UNIFEM. UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, provides technical support and coordination for gender

programs in Afghanistan and is one of the main international bodies mandated to eliminate violence against women. I have worked for UNIFEM in the past, but this article is written in my private capacity as an independent researcher and does not necessarily reflect the beliefs or opinions of UNIFEM. My discussion will be limited to one perspective out of a range of approaches and frameworks related to domestic violence in Afghanistan.

POST-CONFLICT AFGHANISTAN

Instability characterized the immediate post-Taliban period in 2002, with large-scale reconstruction projects and a sizeable influx of international funds and workers fundamentally transforming the Afghan landscape. The move from the ascetic regime of the Taliban to political and economic systems predicated on Western ideals of pluralist open-market representative democracy was rapid, and Afghan society, particularly in urban areas, struggled to cope with the unpredictability and anxiety of transition. While initially the post-conflict period and reconstruction were greeted with optimism and hope, poorly managed expectations, broken promises, and the limited agency of Afghans in deciding the future of their country led, by mid-2003, to a downturn in public opinion towards the foreigner presence. While by 2005, such negative public opinion was more often tempered with recognition that life in Afghanistan was better than it had been before, distrust of foreigners and criticism of their reconstruction agendas continued to be a strong thread of Afghan discontent (Kamal 2006).

Many Afghans dismiss the reconstruction period's emphasis on women's participation as being "overly Western" or a corruption of Afghan society and morals. Such tensions are not new, as movements for women's emancipation in Afghanistan have historically been imposed from central governing elite and resisted by religious groups and the urban lower middle class (Centlivres-Demont 1994). Alternatively viewed as modernization or decadence, recent changes in women's status have been influenced by contradictory forces: international agencies have invested in independent media outlets staffed and managed entirely by women, while conservative groups have sought to ban women's voices from TV and radio broadcasts in different parts of the country. Some development agencies have enforced female quotas in their hiring practices, while women from many Afghan households have been forbidden from working with international organizations due to concerns that international workplaces are linked with prostitution. In 2005, a note attached to one of three murdered Afghan women in Baghlan Province claimed that the murders were "a lesson" to other Afghan women working with international organizations (IRIN 2005).



This cartoon, published in an Afghan newspaper, shows an unveiled miniskirt-wearing woman beating a man on the head with a "law that women must be supported" club as the man asks "don't hit! Why are you hitting?"

Tensions in Afghan society also arise out of the development sector's generous provision of female literacy courses and employment quotas. Some men feel that opportunities for women surpass those open to men, and there are occasional indications that resentment against women has increased as a result. The cartoon on the left, published in a more conservative Afghan newspaper, offers some insight into sentiments raised by initiatives on women's rights. The cartoon imagery is clear in its criticism of household power reversals in Afghanistan: an angry, muscular woman dressed in fashionable Western clothing uses the "law that women must be supported" to beat a passive, fearful man wearing a patched shirt against the background of a broken home.

Looking past the immediate "male backlash" sentiments he expresses, the man in the cartoon could be seen to pose a challenging question: why reify women's concerns into a counter-productive form of political correctness that excludes men, when men could be helpful in participating in and championing social causes in support of women? Historically, gains in Afghan women's rights have tended to emerge from voluntary concessions made by men in power, rather than as a result of women's lobbying (Dupree 1998). Further, Afghan men and women's lives are intimately intertwined, leaving programs that focus on women rather than the entire Muslim household to be unsustainable and ineffective (Dupree 1998; among others). It would be simplistic to suggest that reform to the entrenched and deep male power structures of Afghan society would be conceded easily or without acrimony between the sexes. However, there may be some truth to the suggestion that strategies for women's empowerment based on Western feminist movements and the fight for individual rights in secular industrial nations do not work well within the religious household-centered logics of Afghanistan. Indeed, some recent analysis of gender practice in post-Taliban Afghanistan has again reiterated the need to stop sidelining Afghan men, their needs, and their interests in the gender debate (Abirafeh 2005).

Domestic violence, already a sensitive issue in its own right, is particularly difficult to address in Afghanistan. First, domestic violence is not a concept that is well-defined or high on the Afghan social agenda. The terms "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence" are not yet terms that are in widespread use in public discourse or even among development elites, for reasons that will be discussed shortly. Second, women's lives with their intimate partners, especially in rural areas, are most often based on multiple, interrelated forms of violence, making it difficult to focus on or even find simple cases of domestic violence.

Is a child bride's misery categorized as domestic violence or violations of child rights? Does a woman, forced to marry, suffer domestic violence or slavery? Third, there are barriers to addressing domestic violence directly. The primary focus of relevant media campaigns, reforms to the judicial system, and mobilizations of women's groups has instead been on ending harmful customary practices. Such practices are understood implicitly to lead to a very high likelihood of prolonged and harsh domestic violence, but the domestic violence itself is not discussed. Instead, traditions that contribute to it are vigorously denounced as a measure of the backwardness of society, especially in rural areas. Reasons for not explicitly addressing, or indeed, using the term "domestic violence" might include:

Traditions and customary practices contributing to domestic violence in Afghanistan include the following:

- Child marriage
- *Badal* (two families exchanging females for marriage)
- *Bad* (As compensation for a crime, giving a female away in marriage to the family of the victim)
- Enforced marriage of a widow to her husband's male relative, as this often leads to harsh treatment of the "burdensome" widow and her children
- Giving *mahr* (Islamic bride-price) to the family of the bride rather than the bride herself, as this can lead to the "sale" of young daughters

- its invisibility relative to other more extreme forms of violence against women;
- acceptance of everyday household violence and forced marital sex as normal;
- rationalization of domestic violence as a measure to protect clan honor;
- discomfort at trespassing into the sanctity of the Afghan home; and
- widespread belief that wife beatings are permissible under Islam.

Finally, there is very little reliable data on domestic violence in Afghanistan. The Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs and organizations like the Afghan Women Judges Association, Medica Mondiale, or Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission have documented and worked on exceptional cases of domestic

violence for several years.¹ However, they have not had sufficient capacity or resources to systematize and extend their efforts beyond ad hoc, reactive measures. Development literature suggests that domestic violence rises in post-conflict situations due to “the availability of weapons, the violence male family members have experienced or meted out, the lack of jobs, shelter, and basic services” (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002, 14). Further, anecdotally, numerous activists suggest that female perpetrators of domestic violence (usually female in-laws or stepmothers) account for a great deal of violence in households. As of this writing,² however, there is limited information on the prevalence and severity of domestic violence in Afghanistan, and its more egregious form of honor killings is underreported and covered up. One exception to this is the degree of coverage Afghan women’s suicides by self-immolation have received in the media,³ raising awareness that something is going fundamentally awry within the household, and that female despair needs urgently to be addressed.

CASE STUDY: UNIFEM MEDIA STRATEGY

One of the most direct and protracted media interventions combating violence against women in Afghanistan was conducted by UNIFEM in 2005. Given that women inhabit a very sensitive space in Afghan society as emblems of honor, and Afghans distrust foreigners in general and Western norms regarding women in particular, UNIFEM had to choose its media strategies carefully to avoid causing harm. UNIFEM’s strategy was to discuss gender concerns within the framework of benefits to the family and Afghan society, and repeatedly highlight concerns over violence from multiple perspectives directly and indirectly, embedded among numerous interrelated issues relevant to Afghan men and women.

Historically, there was clear precedent to justify such care. Zealously enforced reforms by the Communist government in 1978 decreed, among other things, compulsory women’s literacy and fundamental changes to Afghan marriages, causing outrage and forming much of the basis for refugee migration and bloody insurgency during the Soviet occupation beginning in 1979 (Centlivres-Demont

¹ For coverage of some exceptional cases of domestic violence, see: Sarah Kamal’s *No Longer Behind Closed Doors: Violence Against Women*, and Kevin Sites’ *Child Bride*.

² UNIFEM announced an initiative to maintain a database for tracking violence against women on February 28, 2006. See UNIFEM’s *UNIFEM Launches Database to Track Violence Against Women in Afghanistan*.

³ The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) released a report in March 2006 citing over 150 cases of women’s self-immolation in western Afghanistan and 34 cases in the southeast. See AIHRC’s *Evaluation Report on General Situation of Women in Afghanistan*.

1994). Further, there is generally resistance to Afghan government interference in the internal life of communities due to the insular nature of rural politics and traditions of self-government in Afghan villages (Rubin 1994). Domestic matters and internal conflicts are understood to be in the private realm, and not a space where the government, let alone the international community, can legitimately intervene.

A more practical concern for UNIFEM, however, was access to the media production infrastructure. The Taliban had banned most forms of media, destroyed printing presses, cassettes, videotapes, photographs, and televisions, and allowed only one official broadcast, Voice of Shari'at (formerly the national state radio station, Radio Afghanistan) in the areas they controlled.⁴ After the fall of the Taliban, there was heavy investment in rebuilding media infrastructure. By 2005, Afghanistan boasted a wide range of media choice: hundreds of publications, around 50 radio stations, 5 major television stations as well as their affiliates, internet, satellite television and radio, and more. This diverse local media was augmented by an increase in foreign broadcasts reaching Afghan soil from institutions such as the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Pakistan, Deutsche Welle, and Radio Tehran. Conducting a national media campaign became complicated by the fact that media outlets were owned and operated by very disparate groups, and purchasing production or airtime was very expensive. Further, aside from a handful of women-managed media outlets, the vast majority of state and local media were dominated and controlled by men. Pressing forward with a coordinated, effective, and comprehensive media campaign upholding women's rights with a limited budget, given the many competing voices and interests in the media sphere, posed significant challenges.

UNIFEM's strategy was finally to publish and feed a "toolkit" of arguments and information necessary for advocacy on gender concerns to media across Afghanistan. In March 2005, UNIFEM distributed over 1400 English and Dari copies of the founding issue of the toolkit, called Gender Advocacy in Afghanistan, to journalist training centers, journalist associations, media outlets, and news agencies across the country as well as civil society organizations, UN agencies, government ministries, and research centers. The aim of the toolkit was to facilitate and strengthen gender-based reporting across the country, and it operated on a number of principles:

⁴ This applies to the areas under Taliban control only. The Northern Alliance, who retained control over around 10 percent of Afghanistan throughout their battles with the Taliban, operated their own radio and television station from the north, and did not ban other media forms.

1. *Ensuring that coverage of toolkit issues eased Afghan journalists' workload.* The toolkit freely donated a skeletal structure for journalistic pieces on gender every month, aiming to make reporting on gender very attractive and easy in the hard deadlines and stress of the media world. The toolkit provided sources and, where possible, internet sites relevant to the information it provided and did not require attribution for its own contributors' writings. By bringing together accurate and contextually sensitive resources that journalists would otherwise have a more difficult time finding in the confusion and devastated infrastructure of the post-conflict period, the toolkit worked to ensure that coverage of the month's gender issues would be a voluntary yet pragmatic choice for the media.
2. *Coordinating gender advocacy messages across institutions, platforms, and languages.* Language in Afghanistan can vary a great deal from one region to the next, so the toolkit's condensed gender advocacy information was designed to support media outlets in discussing issues in their own local languages, framed in their community's concerns. Published in Dari, the Afghan government's working language, the toolkit content was intended for local translation, framing, and dissemination via radio, television, news agency, newspapers or magazines. Further, the toolkit was also distributed to training centers, libraries, the UN, NGOs, and government bodies, hoping to strengthen the impact and authority of its core messages through many-layered multi-platform repetition.
3. *Embedding core concerns over violence against women among social issues more immediately compelling to the male dominated media sector.* Each volume of the toolkit presented skeletal level facts, arguments, and information on four or five gender problems, with at least one problem portraying matters from a male point of view, while the rest focused on women or women and men. Highlighting the financial, religious, and social burdens gender problems caused for men in Afghanistan, the toolkit worked to demonstrate that gender was not only relevant to women. Furthermore, by taking men's side and raising awareness of a number of male concerns made invisible by the gender sector's more entrenched focus on women, the toolkit framed women's suffering and needs with sensitivity towards the suffering of men.

For example, where much had been made of women's low literacy rates (14%), the toolkit opened discussion on Afghan men's literacy rates (43%), arguing that there was a surprising dearth of literacy projects for men given Afghanistan's male literacy rate being fourth lowest in the world (UNIFEM

2005b).⁵ The toolkit also advocated for the rights of the disabled as a predominantly male issue (78% of Afghanistan's disabled are men) and presented links to associations offering vocational and computer training for the disabled (UNIFEM 2005d). Aside from the ethical imperative of raising awareness of injustices against men in Afghan society, inclusion of male issues worked to show that agreement with the toolkit's gender arguments in favor of men called for similar openness to arguments regarding women's interests, and vice versa.

4. *Illustrating how practices traditionally understood as harmful to women are harmful to men.* To give added weight and fresh perspective to women's issues already well covered by the media, the toolkit worked to demonstrate the harm posed to men by practices harmful to women. Forced marriage, for example, seen more often as a form of violence against women, was investigated from a male point of view, highlighting cases of male depression and powerlessness in the face of clan pressure to accede to marriage arrangements (UNIFEM 2005a). In another example, in discussing difficulties men face in finding employment, the toolkit quietly noted that households in which women were allowed to work were more financially stable than those in which only men worked, indirectly advocating for women's employment. (UNIFEM 2005e).
5. *Focusing gender arguments primarily on values with resonance within the community.* The toolkit's gender issues were presented in persuasive form using ethics and logic, arguing for change using Islamic edicts, Afghan values, the well-being of Afghan families and society, nationalistic pride, the Afghan Constitution and law, and the legal obligations on the Afghan state under international human rights treaties. The basis for the persuasive power of the toolkit came from appealing to values the audience already held rather than suggesting the need for a shift to a new paradigm or ideology; consequently, the impetus for Afghans' changed behavior would emerge from the dissonance of not acting according to their own belief system rather than concession to the cudgel of the "law that women must be supported." Maintenance of women's rights and welfare was positioned as a natural pillar of Afghan society – indeed, Afghans pride themselves on the high esteem they accord women and motherhood – rather than a foreign, or especially Western, concept. This may seem like a self-evident point, but it was often not practiced in Afghanistan's media initiatives, especially since

⁵ Women's and men's literacy rates in Afghanistan were in fact comparable, with both rated as fourth lowest in the world by the 2004 United Nations Human Development Report.

international human rights frameworks are based around the individual rather than the collective, and consequently rights-based media campaigns have often been subtly shaded with assumptions and arguments not entirely in keeping with Afghanistan's community-based social order.

Careful choosing of culturally resonant arguments was particularly important when tackling sensitive issues. In Afghanistan, beatings, mobility restrictions, child marriages, or honor killings are often justified on the grounds of protecting clan honor, which is closely linked with the reputation and virtue of females in the clan. Women leaving the protection of their clan have very few alternatives. Un-chaperoned women passing a night away from the household bring great shame to themselves and their families, and face harsh violence or even death should they try to return home. Women's shelters are therefore very poorly regarded institutions, perceived as brothels rather than legitimate havens for battered women and children. The toolkit's section on shelters, entitled "Protection of Women in Afghanistan," thus was careful to begin by applauding the Afghan value of respecting and protecting women; cite the Prophet Mohammad's example in protecting women in his household; list uncontroversial reasons (danger for themselves or their children at the hands of alcohol abusers, armed groups, trafficking, murder) for women to flee households that failed to protect them; and emphasize the Ministry of Women's Affairs as the responsible body protecting women through the shelter system (UNIFEM 2005f). While much more certainly did need to be said on shelters to legitimize them in the eyes of Afghans, the toolkit worked from the belief that social change is a long-term project and aimed to only ever be an acceptably small step away from majority public opinion.

6. *Ensuring the toolkit's legitimacy and intrinsic usefulness.* Each issue of the toolkit was researched carefully, presenting factual information and precise wordings of Afghan laws and relevant passages from the Qur'an, as well as including information and phone numbers that people could turn to for more information or help. Statistics useful for advocacy but also interesting in their own right, such as the illiteracy rates of Afghanistan versus those of its neighbors, aimed to offer something new from authoritative sources on every issue and act as a useful addition to journalist libraries. The toolkit's communications process was two-tiered: the toolkit's immediate audience was journalists and media developers, and via them the toolkit hoped to reach its final audience of the general Afghan public. The accuracy, reliability, apparent social benefit, and timeliness of chosen issues factored into developing a goodwill relationship with journalists and worked to lessen the likelihood of the toolkit being discarded or dismissed.

7. *Sensitizing the media sector itself to gender issues.* The toolkit played a dual role in both providing information to media for their purpose of changing attitudes in Afghan society generally, and also working to change attitudes within the media sector in the process. Afghan journalists play an important role in opinion-making and shaping public discourse, thus UNIFEM hoped to expose journalists and media institutions to a form of long distance gender sensitization via the toolkit and its cover letters, which explicitly described some of the toolkit's strategies and principles. Mixing irrefutable and uncontroversial gender arguments among more sensitive ones, following a line of argument from one issue to the next, and presenting different issues related to domestic violence in every volume, the toolkit worked to demonstrate principles of solid argumentation and persuasion by example and also point journalists in the direction of helpful resources on gender issues.
8. *Linking with community groups and movements.* As a final, opportunistic strategy, UNIFEM linked its toolkit messages with civil society events and movements where possible. The first congress of the Afghan Midwifery Association allowed that month's toolkit to present information on maternal health in line with the congress' main concerns. A demonstration organized by Afghan women civil society organizations decrying honor killings allowed UNIFEM, with the permission of the demonstration organizers, to distribute an excerpt of the toolkit to participants and media at the demonstration that listed *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) and Afghan laws prohibiting vigilante behavior and informal justice mechanisms (UNIFEM 2005c).

EMERGENT CONCERNS

The media's efforts to raise awareness of domestic violence has generally been influenced by the weak and corrupt condition of Afghanistan's judicial and law enforcement systems. At best, the justice system has had limited success in penalizing violence against women. At worst, it has found rape victims guilty of adultery or detained runaway girls and women in jail where they have been abused by prison guards. The reach of the formal justice system has been mostly limited to the major cities in Afghanistan, leaving village councils, institutions with track records of violating women's rights, as the main mechanisms for law and order in Afghanistan's 80% rural landscape.

Village councils as informal judicial institutions have not protected women adequately and have been prone to exacerbate matters with impunity, offering a veneer of legitimacy to violent acts against women through blaming the victim or promoting customary practices detrimental to women's safety and health. There have been efforts to address the deficiencies of the official justice system and outlaw village-level customary practices. Given its limitations in reach, resources, and legitimacy, however, the central government will be unable to adequately challenge the exis-

tence of informal systems of law and order for some time.

In some ways, the media has been used to compensate for the central government's limited judicial and enforcement mechanisms. Insecurity and poor infrastructure in rural Afghanistan have discouraged development agencies from having a significant physical presence outside of Kabul or other major urban centers. As a consequence, the radio – a cheap, battery-operated and accessible medium without literacy requirements – has been a central vehicle for extending development efforts and disseminating messages on voting and the political process across the country. Extension of the central government's judicial framework has followed a similar logic, with the texts of legal documents such as the Afghan Constitution and/or laws regarding, for example, marriage registration or the minimum age of marriage, being broadcast to rural areas. These broadcasts have intended to spread information that would present opportunities for self-regulation or lend weight and authority to negotiations for practices more in line with the central government's legal frameworks in areas otherwise inaccessible to the formal justice system.

The main concern emerging from such notions of justice by media proxy, however, has been that women in abusive situations would suffer a double burden, becoming aware of the degree to which their rights were being violated, yet having no adequate recourse for escaping their situation. In some cases, as with the issue of women's suicide by self-immolation, investigative journalism has raised the profile of women's domestic circumstances to a national level and sparked government inquiries into the circumstances surrounding women's lives. More generally, however, in the seclusion of *purdah*⁶ and with the absence of an effective judicial system, escalation of the profile of domestic violence via the media may well have adverse consequences for women's psychological well-being.

While lack of resources often limit audience research activities, there is a clear imperative for careful monitoring and evaluation of media campaigns on gender given the potential for unintended and detrimental outcomes, particularly on sensitive concerns such as domestic violence. Unfortunately, UNIFEM did not investigate the effect of its toolkit strategy. While feedback from recipients of the toolkit was positive, there was inadequate monitoring of Afghan media output to determine the degree to which the information presented in the toolkits was adopted by journalists and passed on to the general public, and no audience research to determine the consequences, both positive and negative, of the general public's reception of the toolkit's information. UNIFEM collaborated with Afghan National Television, a television station based in Kabul, to co-produce a brief video program called "Why Violence?" that was catalyzed by UNIFEM's gender advocacy

⁶ Editor's Note: *Purdah* refers to a practice that occurs in some cultures in which women are secluded from men, other than very close relatives.

toolkit (UNIFEM 2005g). Aside from this initiative, however, there is little information on the outcomes, impact, and constructiveness of UNIFEM's media strategy.

This case study concludes that UNIFEM's media strategy on domestic violence presents an example of a media intervention designed with care and sensitivity to the context it inhabited, but that lack of evaluation presents a major flaw in the approach that will need to be addressed if the strategy is to be analyzed effectively or employed further.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Women in Afghanistan are certainly not a homogeneous group. Their problems are multifaceted and varied, and deserving of equally multifaceted and varied solutions. Domestic violence, as a global concern cutting across race, age, and class, presents dilemmas and challenges in the Afghan context which require comprehensive and coordinated efforts to resolve. At the national level, there must be due diligence on the part of the state to end impunity and prosecute effectively, establish preventative measures against violence, and systematize protective structures such as shelters, legal counseling, trained female police officers, and emergency systems to respond to urgent situations. Afghanistan's first Family Intervention Unit, based in a police station in Kabul, was launched in 2005, and an Interministerial Task Force to Eliminate Violence Against Women now coordinates action and policy regarding violence against women across government ministries. A database to track national statistics on violence against women was also launched this year to identify gaps in strategies and service provision. Prospects for Afghan women are improving slowly and unevenly, but noticeably.

Media campaigns, as one level of intervention in the problem of domestic violence, are limited to the realm of persuasion, notification, and rhetoric, and further constrained by the media's reach and the public's access to radio sets, televisions, or literacy skills. The power of the media lies in the intangible rather than the institutional, in recreating the boundaries of what is permissible and in instilling questions about existing norms. The ephemeral nature and shifting multiple meanings of public discourse make the impact of media interventions hard to measure. However, in the long-term, it may well be the power of the media - predicated on the assumption that domestic violence, as a cause and indication of suffering within intimate and hidden worlds, is most effectively brought to the surface with tact, sensitivity, and compassion - that helps shift changes in societal norms regarding domestic violence from surface practices to deep values.

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A PRELIMINARY MODEL FOR PROVIDING A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

By Maryam Funches

Domestic violence is a problem that does not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, age, nationality, or sex (Schulman 1980). However, repeated needs assessments have demonstrated that numerous gaps in the availability of culturally sensitive counseling services often keep Muslim women trapped in volatile domestic violence situations. Recognizing the seriousness of this problem, there is a need to develop an effective advocacy mechanism that will pursue preventative measures and remedies to eradicate domestic violence within the Muslim community.

Accordingly, the mission of such a project would be to serve as a comprehensive domestic violence resource for Muslim women. With emphasis on health promotion and preventative education, the project's mission would permit a wide range of wellness delivery programs designed to eradicate the root causes of domestic violence. In pursuit of this mission, the project can serve as a forum to increase awareness of the problems of domestic violence; provide qualitative social service programs to victims of domestic violence; offer direct counseling services; and disseminate educational brochures and pamphlets that respond to community needs.

Project goals would be as follows:

- 1) To increase awareness of domestic violence to the general population, and Muslim women in particular and build better community understanding about the problems of domestic violence;
- 2) To increase community commitment to developing a domestic violence prevention program that affirmatively works to eradicate the root causes of domestic violence; and
- 3) To implement a community counseling delivery model that is structured and designed to accommodate the cultural needs and privacy of Muslim women.

DIRECT COMMUNITY SERVICES

In partnership with area mosques and Muslim community centers the domestic violence awareness program would aim to teach risk identification, abuse and violence identification, safety planning for possible situations, problem solving techniques and present information on services available for battered women and their families. The program would also establish a community domestic violence

council comprised of community activists, lawyers, clients, and counselors to address the problem and develop protocols. The protocols would allow for early identification of abuse and a willingness of Muslim leaders and religious organizations to deal with the situation in order to protect the victims from further abuse or victim blaming.

DIRECT CLIENT SERVICES

The proposed project recognizes the diverse Islamic perspectives surrounding Muslim women, including Islamic hierarchy structure. Accordingly, the project, in part, would target the Muslim population and would be structured to address their unique needs. Program counselors would conduct sessions at satellite centers as part of women's educational circles. These presentations would involve informal presentations, question and answer sessions, and the distribution of leaflets and pamphlets regarding domestic violence. The strategy would be to utilize a familiar environment as an opportunity to provide outreach and counseling.

INDIRECT COMMUNITY SERVICES

In every urban area in the U.S. there are many mosques and Islamic organizations. Some regions also have Islamic radio stations, Islamic television stations, and regional Muslim politicians. A Muslim domestic violence program would focus upon strengthening partnerships with local legislators, businesses, skilled professionals, and the media to advocate strengthening legislation to protect battered women and their children.

INDIRECT CLIENT SERVICES

Finally, the foundation of the proposed project would be rooted in networking, assessing resources, and developing partnerships throughout the community. A great deal of effort would be invested in this objective. The program would be designed to systematize coordination with social services professionals and thus expand direct social services, including emergency food, shelter, and cash assistance to abused women.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Islam neither encourages nor allows violence against women. While most religious leaders recognize domestic violence as Islamically unacceptable, when an incidence of domestic violence is reported the general response is to avoid "interfering" in family affairs. Furthermore, few community leaders have training in the area of domestic violence counseling or know how to intervene effectively and legally.

Experience has taught us that victims of domestic violence often only seek counseling in an emergency or crisis situation. However, problems need not reach crisis proportion before potential victims of domestic violence receive services.

Direct community education is a proactive means to curtail potentially volatile situations. Accordingly, a successful domestic violence program must include a comprehensive community prevention component.

The first critical step towards developing preventative education is to change the mindset of the community concerning domestic violence. In some Muslim circles, a woman may be beaten severely by her husband or male relatives for something as ridiculous as not having dinner prepared on time. Even in such cases the Muslim community often refuses to intervene. Such a mindset must change from the top. Workshops and training sessions are needed to educate religious leaders and others in high profile positions within the Muslim community.

In developing culturally sensitive domestic violence workshops it is important to recognize that there are both traditional and moderate Islamic perspectives as to the level of activities that a Muslim woman should have in society. Expressed in an extreme form, Muslim women should be lodged safely at home, never venturing outside except when there is an obvious necessity for her to do so. Under this school of thought the woman has no public or social contact outside of the domain of her house and beyond her role as a housewife and a mother. A more moderate perspective allows more freedom and scope for the woman outside her home. Within a culturally sensitive environment, the domestic violence workshops would be designed to meet the following objectives:

- 1) To build better community understanding about the problems of domestic violence and increase community commitment to an affirmative action plan;
- 2) To repudiate religious edicts which justify a man beating his wife; and
- 3) To support victims in protecting themselves and their children by validating their experiences, providing support, resources and options.

Activities to meet the above-mentioned objectives can include pamphlet distribution, group interaction, volunteer recruitment, role playing and a question and answer session. The program can take advantage of the vast array of resources which exist within each urban area, including Islamic scholars who are available for speaking engagements. Islamic centers serving significant numbers of Muslims provide a built-in audience for the domestic violence workshop, as well as in-kind space to conduct the workshops.

The workshops would be very interactive and designed to deepen participants' personal understanding about domestic violence. For instance, the workshop facilitator can ask volunteers from the workshop to assume the role of husband and wife in acting out a scene. The scenario could involve a husband coming home from a long day at work, where his boss informed him of possible layoffs. He also learned from his financial planner that his stock has dropped considerably. His wife

has just returned from visiting a friend and taking their eight month-old son to the doctor. When the husband arrives home, their son is crying at the top of his lungs because of the pain from his ear infection. The house is a "wreck" and the wife's sister is sitting in the living room.¹

The workshop could divide into two groups to complete the following task. One workshop group can complete the scene and determine how the husband would respond if he was prone to domestic violence. The other workshop group could determine how the husband would respond if he is a supportive and loving husband. Workshop participants would then assume the role of imam, wife, husband, sister, and friend to determine what, if anything, in the script they consider to be forms of domestic violence. Based upon the role they have assumed, workshop participants can discuss what they feel their responsibility is to the husband and the wife. Groups would determine if any of the actions were justified and explain why. Participants could also discuss what could have been done to prevent the domestic violence from happening. The responses from the groups would serve as the point of departure to develop a working definition for domestic violence. The presenter could also include a discussion on preventative measures to buffer stressful situations that often lead to domestic violence and present a list of referral agencies and resources.²

Additionally, a well-respected Muslim scholar could discuss the role of women in Islam. Specific emphasis can be used to explain the numerous verses in the Holy Qur'an which enjoin kindness to women. The scholar would also clarify the relationship between men and women and dispel misconceptions about a man's right to beat a "disobedient" wife.

As a culminating event of the workshop, participants would revisit their evaluation of the scene and determine whether there are actions which they now consider forms of domestic violence. They would also revisit whether there are additional preventative measures that they now recommend. Additionally, the facilitator would invite participants to complete a volunteer form if they are interested in working with an area domestic violence council.

Other preventative actions that the domestic violence program could implement include developing anger management classes and classes on how husbands

¹ Editor's Note: Many men experience similar situations without resorting to domestic violence. When men who are abusive use such circumstances as excuses for their behavior, it is a reflection of their need to maintain power and control over their partners, as well as a lack of taking responsibility for their behavior

² Editor's Note: In situations of domestic violence, it is the abuser whose behavior must be focused upon and changed, not the victims.

can become supportive and loving mates.³ Men may spend years learning how to become doctors, lawyers, brick masons, or architects, but few train for the most significant decision of their life-- marriage. Many Muslims refer to marriage as being half of ones faith. With this backdrop as a foundation, religious leaders are in a prime position to work in partnership with such a program in developing and encouraging men to participate in marriage classes.

Related to the issue of domestic violence for many women, is a Muslim woman's lack of economic resources to maintain family stability. These economic problems result from many impediments such as poor educational backgrounds and lack of job training. Thus, communities must develop viable educational opportunities and employment training for at-risk women. There must be a community-driven, comprehensive social service system which encourages Muslim organizations to become effective partners in providing services to those women who are most marginalized by the system. Additional preventative services should include free or reduced-fee medical and dental care, emergency financial assistance, and emergency shelter for displaced families.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Divorce in Islam is frowned upon at best, and forbidden at worst. Accordingly, for a Muslim woman to initiate a divorce against her spouse can be a very trying experience. This stress factor is particularly acute when the woman is a victim of domestic violence. In fact, in up to "75% of the domestic assaults reported to law enforcement agencies, the victim is already divorced or separated from the abuser at the time of the incident" (Flitcraft and Stark 1987, 301). Research also shows that domestic violence tends to escalate in both frequency and severity over time. "The longer violence continued over months and years the more serious and dangerous it became progressing from verbal abuse to frequent punching to use of weapons" (Gillespie 1982, 129). In such situations, community counselors must develop effective crisis intervention strategies.

Additionally, statistics reveal that upon separation from her husband, a woman's standard of living drops dramatically (Ewing 1987). If the victim has children this change may occur during the children's vital childhood years. These problems increase stress for clients as the danger of domestic violence increases rather than decreases immediately after the parties' separation. With these statistics as a back-

³ Editor's Note: Anger management may be only one component of most Batterers' Intervention Programs, whose goals are to provide safety for the victim and to help the abuser take responsibility for violent and controlling behavior. Abusers do not abuse simply because they have a temper. The underlying issue in domestic violence is the abuser's need and desire to have power and control over the partner.

drop, counselors must, at a minimum, proactively develop a domestic violence crisis intervention program that includes the following:

- 1) *Assessing the nature of the crisis.* Many clients return to their batterer for various economic and psychological reasons. While a domestic violence program should communicate to the client that it remains available to her even if she returns to her batterer, the counselor must also consider working in partnership with legal counsel and the police to determine if the client's life is in danger. Clients will often return to their abusers when the potential for abuse is greatest. Such scenarios present both ethical and counseling challenges which the program must address.
- 2) *Helping the client clarify the immediate problem.* Fear, be it real or contrived, is a powerful emotion which can immobilize a client. The program must educate clients as to the cycle of domestic violence to assist them in isolating specific triggering events that lead to anxiety, depression, or other forms of stress.
- 3) *Making the problem manageable.* Abused women are often intertwined in court battles with their husbands concerning divorce, child custody, and support. This creates an overwhelming experience particularly when the client is not represented by counsel. The program must network with pro-bono attorneys and non-profit legal service providers to ensure that clients have free or reduced fee legal representation.
- 4) *Identify additional sources of support.* Lack of financial resources to secure appropriate housing is a dominant stress factor for many abused women. Thus, the program would serve as a liaison in identifying emergency housing and subsidized transitional housing for abused women.

Affordable and quality childcare is also often a stress factor for women returning to the work force, or those who may need to secure a second job to supplement their income. The program would work in partnership with state social services programs and community daycare providers to help participants meet childcare needs.
- 5) *Identify personal strengths.* The community domestic violence program must move forward with the assistance of members and individuals who share the same ideology to establish a culturally sensitive women's empowerment center. The center would include job training and a computer laboratory, which participants could utilize to obtain on-line accredited degrees.
- 6) *Exploring feelings.* Women often spend a great deal of their time attending to others' needs. The program would offer one-on-one and group counseling sessions as opportunities for women to explore and express their true inner thoughts and feelings.

- 7) *Developing a strategy for coping with the situation.* Abused women often have superior abilities to cope with volatile situations. The challenge is to enable women to redirect that skill to defusing stress that such situations produce. Through the development of basic life skills and personal management training, clients would first identify prior successful techniques and determine how they can implement those same techniques in crisis situations.⁴
- 8) *Planning for the prevention of future crises.* The domestic violence program would sponsor periodic weekend retreats as part of ongoing family wellness programs.

Ultimately, a successful crisis intervention program would enable battered women to go on with their lives, separate from their abusers, and create safe, non-violent homes for themselves and their children.

COUNSELING ISSUES AND APPROACH

There is a powerful psychological dynamic at work in domestic violence cases which legal remedies alone cannot change. Clients may have been abused for years and may find it difficult to extricate themselves from the abusive relationship. Women involved in these marriages may have extremely low self-esteem, and be unable to envision a life apart from the batterer. In addition, the man's abusive behavior may have been erratic; he may have been overly affectionate and even apologetic about his abuse.

Another significant barrier to a woman ending a cycle of abuse is the existence of children with the abuser. A father may threaten to snatch the children or to secure custody of them. In the alternative, a woman may have been forced to leave her children at home with their father to flee from a life-threatening situation. She may have felt that the children were safe with their father. However, "a violent father will often use the children as a tool in his continuing efforts to control the client" (Chestler 1989, 4). Thus, the community counseling program must include a component specifically designed to address the psychological impact domestic violence has on children. This component is particularly critical since it is well documented that children of domestic violence are more likely to become abusers or live in violent relationships.

For many years, various Islamic organizations have worked to build a strong

⁴ Editor's Note: Abused women should create a safety plan to protect themselves and their children. Such a plan may include keeping copies of important documents, extra clothing, money, and an extra set of keys in a safe place (like the home of a friend or relative) in case they need to quickly leave their situation. Again, the victim is not responsible for preventing abuse; however, knowing how to diffuse the situation may be part of decreasing her risk for being injured.

Islamic environment for children. However, somewhere along the road they took a wrong turn, because Muslim youth are experiencing increasing incidents of social problems. Traditionally, the problems of Muslim youth were assessed in isolation. However, the problems youth experience do not occur in a vacuum. Youth are often reflections of larger community challenges and family dynamics; dysfunctional Muslim families often lead to dysfunctional youth, if appropriate intervention services are not utilized. Now, as Islamic organizations look to the future for children, they need to focus on building healthy families. This effort requires a strong community both internally and externally where the domestic violence counselor becomes pivotal in reaching this vulnerable population.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL POLICY

A salient issue in developing the domestic violence program is how the community can build and shape a morally, ethically, psychologically, and physically safe and healthy society where women are happy and contributing members of society. The first step towards meeting this objective is to train community leaders to serve as protectors of women's safety by example, avoiding blaming wives and recognizing when they do not have the expertise to truly help women who are battered. Once leadership shifts its "don't ask, don't tell" policy, the number of viable programs to assist battered women will increase. Such policy shifts will also make the various business, social, and educational factions within the community more aware, and hopefully, more responsive to the needs of abused women.

Businesses may then be more responsive to assisting women in obtaining economic resources to maintain family stability. Their assistance may come in the way of direct financial assistance, apprenticeships, or long term employment. Educational institutions may also be willing to offer financial aid or work in partnership with victim assistance programs to obtain funding to pay for women's education.

Lack of affordable housing, scarcity of jobs, and lack of community support often keep women trapped in a cycle of abuse -- because they feel there are no viable alternatives. The agency's charge would be to pursue remedies to eradicate these impediments so that women are in a position of stability that enables them to overcome not only psychological problems, but also social-economic barriers. The following outlines proposed social change policy and program possibilities.

A volunteer program is an effective mechanism to provide one-on-one (or family-on-family) mentorship with a directive towards self-sufficiency and independence.⁵ In general, the volunteer develops and implements a case program address-

⁵ Editor's Note: This may be a good option once the abuse has ended and the wife is no longer being harmed. The abuser must have dealt with his violent tendencies, his wife must feel safe, and both must want to renew efforts to heal their relationship.

ing the individual needs of the participating individual/family. The program may involve providing actual training in such areas as budget, nutrition, or job acquisition skills. The program of action may also involve the volunteer networking and identifying resources in the community such as job fairs, employment services or day care facilities. Mentors may direct women towards community resources available to address their particular needs and would be instrumental in the assessment of, involvement in, and completion of the program by the participating individual/family.

Survivors of domestic violence can act as a vital catalyst in forging new coalitions amongst community leaders. In all of these respects, such a program would be designed to develop and strengthen the partnership with local businesses, skilled professionals, associations, and groups. Collectively these coalitions would provide the most effective advocacy mechanism to ensure that women have equal access to justice. Rooted in networking, assessing resources, and developing partnerships throughout the community, the project would work to eradicate domestic violence.

CLIENT ADVOCACY

Our society has long tolerated violence against wives and female partners. When our institutions and our social norms ignored the existence of domestic violence, that silence actually condoned violence so long as it remained behind closed doors. Where violence was recognized, it was viewed as a family matter that would be resolved without intervention if left alone.

This domestic violence program would recognize that clients are subjected to living in a male dominated society that perceives it as natural for a man to have control of a woman, and that such gender bias hinders community response to the problem of domestic violence. However, "policies requiring mandatory reporting and arrest when crimes of domestic violence occur will help to establish that domestic violence is a crime as serious as any other assault and battery" (Walker 1998, 71).

It is well established that arrest is one of the best methods to deter violence in the home (Maxwell, Garner, and Fagan 2002). In a joint study conducted by the Minneapolis Police Department and the National Police Foundation, arrest was found to be most effective in deterring future violence. This result occurred despite the fact that the men arrested received a judicial sanction in only 2% of the cases, even though 80% of all suspects had a history of domestic violence. If police departments respond quickly and effectively to domestic violence calls making arrests on probable cause, such action sends a clear message to batterers and their families that violence against family members will not be tolerated. Additionally, repeat incidents of domestic violence are reduced. Nonetheless, a police foundation study conducted in Kansas City found that in 85% of reported domestic violence homicides, the police had been called to the residence on at least one occasion in the two years prior to the death. In 50% of these homicides, the police had been

called at least five times and no arrests were made.

Counselors must utilize their advocacy skills to promote community awareness of the problem and to encourage legislators to enact laws that send a message that acts of domestic violence are serious crimes. The fact that the victim and the perpetrator are connected by family ties does not mitigate the fact that the victim suffers intimidation, physical injury and sometimes even death at the hands of her abuser. Arrest and serious sentencing laws are mechanisms that continue to break the cycle of violence.

The absence of police and judicial interventions can send clear signals to batterers that their behavior is legal. Then batterers may feel empowered to continue harming their victims. These are cases in which the decision of a judge or a police officer's failure to act will merely preserve the status quo. So, when the legal system takes no action, this penalizes and endangers victims who call the police or come to the court for help, and rewards batterers for their efforts.

The proposed domestic violence program can facilitate efforts to enable clients to work in partnership with advocacy organizations to lobby legislators to strengthen laws that create mandatory arrest in cases of domestic violence. Victims of domestic violence then become active participants in their own self-help program.

APPLICATIONS

The problems surrounding domestic violence are multifaceted. As such, a program design must be holistic to successfully address client's needs. In this regard, a broad view of the counselor's role furthers client's needs and works towards the program's long-term goal of creating systemic change in the area of domestic violence. Specific services could include community forums at collaborative partners' locations. These presentations can be made available in English, Urdu, and Arabic and can often be conducted as part of on-going services. The strategy would be to utilize this familiar environment as an opportunity to provide direct services.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The foundation of good management is rooted in knowledge of the field, appropriate staff training, ongoing communication and feedback, and mechanisms to motivate staff. To fully maximize program objectives, supervision and management of the proposed domestic violence program must be very clearly defined, with the Executive Director responsible for the day-to-day operations. While the Deputy Director would be the direct supervisor of all staff, volunteers and interns, all staff members would assume major responsibility for program planning.

Specifically, each staff member would serve as a member of at least one task force to coordinate advocacy efforts. The task force approach allows for concentrating resources on many priority areas, using staff in dual roles --working on individual cases in their units, while at the same time helping to develop and coordinate focused approaches to community counseling activities. Next, and very

importantly, the task force approach would be used to substantially upgrade the skills of all staff members. Some of the task forces may be merged, and additional ones may be formed, depending on the needs facing the client community and the availability of resources. The key here is to provide staff flexibility in the creation of task forces to facilitate the changing needs of the client population.

To further enhance the programs operation, staff training would be comprehensive and thorough. All staff would be required to complete various specifically outlined training objectives. The training regimen would be designed to include the following: (1) substantive training that is relevant to domestic violence; (2) orientation to local resources and agencies; (3) training in operating procedures, including practical case and time management techniques and case intake systems; and (4) training in diversity in counseling. Staff members would set timelines in which they would be expected to master certain skills. The target would be to prepare each staff member so that they become proficient at handling a vast array of community issues after two years. After three years, it is hoped that the typical staff member would also be ready to mentor new and inexperienced staff in the program and be prepared to assume senior management responsibilities.

Finally, to ensure the success of the community domestic violence program, domestic violence or domestic dis – ease must be seen as a community problem and not merely a personal family matter. Those in positions of authority must serve as vocal advocates to eradicate this problem and join in the national campaign to establish a “zero tolerance” policy. Only then will the Muslim community be creating an environment which is committed to eradicating domestic violence or doing something about domestic dis – ease.

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THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FROM 1789 TO 1861

The history of the United States of America from 1789 to 1861 is a story of growth, struggle, and transformation. It begins with the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, which marked the birth of a new nation. The early years were marked by the struggle for independence from British rule, culminating in the American Revolution. The new nation then faced the challenge of establishing a stable government, which was achieved through the adoption of the Constitution in 1787. The period from 1789 to 1861 is characterized by the expansion of the United States across the continent, the development of a strong economy, and the growth of a national identity. The struggle for slavery and the rights of African Americans was a central theme of this period, leading to the Civil War in 1861. The history of the United States is a testament to the power of the American dream and the resilience of the American people.

The early years of the United States were marked by the struggle for independence from British rule. The American Revolution began in 1775 and ended in 1783 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris. The new nation then faced the challenge of establishing a stable government, which was achieved through the adoption of the Constitution in 1787. The period from 1789 to 1861 is characterized by the expansion of the United States across the continent, the development of a strong economy, and the growth of a national identity. The struggle for slavery and the rights of African Americans was a central theme of this period, leading to the Civil War in 1861.

The history of the United States is a testament to the power of the American dream and the resilience of the American people. It is a story of growth, struggle, and transformation, and it is a story that continues to inspire and inform us today.

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RE

RESOURCES



NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ORGANIZATIONS

MUSLIM

Islamic Social Services Association (ISSA)

1030 E. Baseline Road, Suite 105
PMB 955
Tempe, AZ 85283-1314
Phone: (888) 415-9920
Fax: (602) 532-7057
Email: info@issausa.org
Website: www.issausa.org

The Peaceful Families Project

PO Box 771
Great Falls, VA 22066
Phone: (703) 474-6870
Email: info@peacefulfamilies.org
Website: www.peacefulfamilies.org

ISNA Domestic Violence Forum

Islamic Society of North America
P O Box 38
Plainfield, IN 46168
Phone: (317) 839-8157
Fax: (317) 839-1840
Website: www.isna.net

Kamilat

7007 Georgetown Parkway
Fenton, MI 48430
United States
Phone: (810) 714-3664
Fax: (810) 222-5867
Website: www.kamilat.org
Email: staff@kamilat.org

Karamah

Muslim Women Layers for Human
Rights
1420 16th Street. NW
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 234-7302
Phone: (202) 234-7303
Fax: (202) 234-7304
Email: karamah@karamah.org
Website: www.karamah.org

OTHER**Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence**

450 Sutter Street, Suite 600
San Francisco CA 94108
Phone: (415) 954-9988 x315
Fax: (415) 954-9999
Website: www.apiahf.org/apidvinstitute

FaithTrust Institute

2400 N. 45th Street, Suite 10
Seattle, WA 98103
Phone: (206) 634-1903
Fax: (206) 634-0115
Email: info@faithtrustinstitute.org
Website: www.faithtrustinstitute.org

Family Violence Prevention Fund

383 Rhode Island Street, Suite 304
San Francisco, CA 94013
Phone: (415) 252-8900
Fax: (415) 252-8991
TTY: (800) 595-4889
Email: info@endabuse.org
Website: www.endabuse.org

Legal Momentum

1522 K street NW, Suite 550
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: (202) 326-0040
Fax: (202) 589-0511
Email: iwp@legalmomentum.org
Website: www.legalmomentum.org

National Center on Domestic & Sexual Violence

7800 Shoal Creek Blvd., Ste. 120-N
Austin, TX 78757
Phone: (512) 407-9020
Fax: (512) 407-9022
Website: www.ncdsv.org

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

P.O. Box 18749
Denver, CO 80218
Phone: (303) 839-1852
Fax: (303) 831-9251
TTY: (303) 839-8459
Email: mainoffice@ncadv.org
Website: www.ncadv.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline

Hotline: (800) 799-SAFE (7233)
Hotline TTY: (800) 787-3224

National Network to End Domestic Violence

660 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, Suite 303
Washington, DC 20003
Phone: (202) 543-5566
Fax: (202) 543-5626
Website: www.nnedv.org

National Network to End Violence against Immigrant Women

310-8th Street, Suite 303
Oakland, CA 94607
Phone: (510) 465-1984
Fax: (510) 465-1885
Email: nnirr@nnirr.org
Website: www.nnirr.org

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

6400 Flank Drive, Suite 1300
Harrisburg, PA 17112
Phone: (800) 537-2238
TTY: (800) 553-2508
Website: www.nrcdv.org





**Rape, Abuse & Incest National
Network (RAINN)**

635-B Pennsylvania Avenue SE

Washington, DC 20003

Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE x1

Phone: (202) 544-1034 OR

(800) 656-4673 x3

Fax: (202) 544-3556

Email: info@rainn.org

Website: www.rainn.org

Stop Family Violence

331 West 57th Street, Suite 518

New York, NY 10019

Website: www.stopfamilyviolence.org

**U.S. Department of Justice, Office
of Violence Against Women**

800 K Street, N.W., Suite 920

Washington, DC 20530

Phone: (202) 307-6026

Fax: (202) 307-3911

TTY: (202) 307-2277

Website: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo



LOCAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ORGANIZATIONS

The following organizations offer domestic violence programs and/or referrals.

MUSLIM

North Eastern States

Baitul Hemayah

20-24 Branford Place, Suite 702
Newark, New Jersey 07102
Phone: 973.242.1922
Hotline: 866.HEM.AYAH
Email: info@baitulhemayah.org
Website: www.baitulhemayah.org

WAFA House

P.O. Box 2102
Clifton, NJ 07015-2102
Phone: 800.930.9232
Email: info@wafahouse.org
Website: www.wafahouse.org

The Committee on Domestic Harmony in Long Island, NY

Islamic Center of Long Island
835 Brush Hollow Road
Westbury, New York 11590
Phone: 516.942.6133
Fax: 516.766.6044

Rahama

Buffalo, NY
Phone: 716.908.6505
Email: rahama.dv@gmail.com

Sista2Sista

Philadelphia, PA
Email: sistas@sista2sista.org
Website: www.sista2sista.org

Turning Point

PO Box 670086
Flushing, NY 11367
Phone: 718.883.9400
Fax: 718.883.9449
Email: info@turningpoint-ny.org
Website: www.turningpoint-ny.org

Southern States**Al-Baitu Nisa**

Islamic Center of Maryland
19401 Woodfield Road
Gaithersburg, MD 20879
Phone: 301.840.9440

Baitul Salaam Network

PO Box 11041
Atlanta, GA 30310
Phone: 800.285.9489 pin #00
Email: haleem1@aol.com
Website: www.baitulsalaam.net

Central Texas Muslimaat

3571 Far West Boulevard #109
Austin, Texas 78731
Phone: 512.577.SAFE
Email: yturk@ctmuslimaat.org
Website: www.ctmuslimaat.org

**Foundation for Appropriate and
Immediate Temporary Help
(FAITH)**

500 Grove Street
Herndon, VA 20170
Phone: 571.323.2198 and 571.323.2199
Email: info@faithus.org
Website: www.faithus.org

**ISTABA Family Support and
Resource Center**

7326 Sligh Avenue
Tampa, FL 33610
Phone: 813.663.0140
Email: istabafsrc05@verizon.net
Website: www.i-family-resources.net

**Muslim Community Center for
Human Services**

Al-Shifa Clinic
7600 Glenview Drive
Richland Hills, TX 76181
Phone: 817.589.9165 (HelpLine)
Email: info@mcc-hs.org
Website: www.mcc-hs.org

**Muslim Men Against Domestic
Violence**

(A project of FAITH)
500 Grove Street
Herndon, VA 20170
Phone: 571.323.2198 and 571.323.2199
Email: info@faithus.org
Website: www.faithus.org

Western States

**National Islamic Society of Women
in America (NISWA)**

P.O. Box 1403

Lomita, CA 90717

Phone: 310.748.9087

Website: www.niswa.org

**North American Islamic Shelter for
the Abused (NISA)**

P.O.Box 50515

Palo Alto, CA 94303

Phone: 650.856.0440

Email: admin@ask-nisa.org

Website: www.ask-nisa.org

Rahima Foundation

2302 Calle Del Mundo

Santa Clara, CA 95054

Phone: 408.845.0050

Email: mail@rahima.org

Website: www.rahima.org

SEMAH

39675 Cedar Boulevard, Suite 140

Newark, CA 94560

Phone: 510.659.8535

Help Line: 866.99S.EMAH

Stepping Together

PO Box 2216

Los Gatos, CA 95031

Email: admin@amila.org

Website: www.amila.org

ETHNIC-BASED***Midwestern States*****Apna Ghar**

4753 North Broadway, Suite 632

Chicago, IL 60640

Office: 773.334.0173

Fax: 773.334.0963

Email: info@apnaghar.orgWebsite: www.apnaghar.org**Michigan Asian Indian Family Services**

P.O. Box 252673

West Bloomfield, MI 48325

Phone: 888.664.8624 (Crisis Line)

Phone: 248.477.4985

Email: info@maifs.orgWebsite: www.maifs.org**Arab American Action Network (AAAN)**

3148 W. 63rd Street

Chicago, IL 60629

Phone: 773.436.6060

Email: aaan@aaan.orgWebsite: www.aaan.org**Arab American Family Services**

10608 South Roberts Road

Palos Hills, IL 60465

Phone: 708.974.8084

Fax: 708.974.8086

Website: www.aafamilyservices.org**Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS)**

2651 Saulino Court

Dearborn, MI 48120

Phone: 313.842.7010

Fax: 313.842.5150

Website: www.accesscommunity.org**The Hamdard Center**

228 East Lake Street

Addison, IL 60101

Phone: 630.835.1432

Fax: 630.835.1433

Website: www.hamdardcenter.org

Northeastern States**The Arab-American Family
Support Center**

150 Court Street, 3rd Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
Phone: 718.643.8000
Fax: 718.797.0410
Website: www.aafscny.org

**Asian American Support and
Resource Agency (AASRA)**

54 Cummings Park, Suite 316
Woburn, MA 01801
Phone: 866.922.2772
Email: aasra@aasranewengland.com
Website: www.aasranewengland.org

**Desis Rising Up and Moving
(DRUM)**

72-26 Broadway, 4th Floor
Jackson Heights, NY 11372
Phone: 718.205.3036
Fax: 718.205.3037
Email: info@drumnation.org
Website: www.drumnation.org

Manavi

P.O. Box 3103
New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901
Phone: 732.435.1414
Fax: 732.435.1411
Email: manavi@worldnet.att.net
Website: www.manavi.org

SAHELI- Boston

P. O. Box 1345
Burlington, MA 01803
Phone: 866.4.SAHELI (Helpline)
Email: saheli800@hotmail.com
Website: www.saheliboston.org

Sakhi for South Asian Women

P.O. Box 20208
Greeley Square Station
New York, New York 10001
Phone: 212.868.6741 (Helpline)
Phone: 212.714.9153 (Office)
Fax: 212.564.8745
Email: contactus@sakhi.org
Website: www.sakhi.org

SNEHA, Inc

P. O, Box 271650
West Hartford, CT 06127
Phone: 860.658.4615
Fax: 860.521.1562
Email: sneha@sneha.org
Website: www.sneha.org

**Suffolk County Coalition Against
DV, Long Island, NY**

P.O.Box 1269
Bay Shore, NY 11706
24-Hour Hotline: 631.666.8833
(including a language translation
service)
Office: 631.666.7181
TTY: 631.233.3626
Website: www.sccadv.org

Southern States**Asian/Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resource Project**

P.O. Box 14268
Washington, D.C. 20044
Phone: 202.464.4477
Fax: 202.986.9332
Email: info@dvrp.org
Website: www.dvrp.org

Asian Women's Self- Help Association (ASHA)

P.O. Box 2084
Rockville, MD 20847
Helpline: 888.417.2742
Email: asha@ashaforwomen.org
Website: www.ashaforwomen.org

Asians Against Domestic Violence (AADA)

P.O. Box 420776
Houston, TX 77242-0776
Toll free: 866.833.AADA or
866.833.2232
Phone: 713.339.8300
Email: info@aadainc.org
Website: www.aadainc.org

Counselors Helping Asian Indians (CHAI)

4517 Redleaf Court
Ellicott City, MD 21043
Phone: 410.461.1634
Email: raziachai@hotmail.com

DAYA, Inc

6 White Pillars Lane
P.O. Box 571774
Houston, TX 77257
Phone: 713.914.1333
Email: info@dayahouston.org
Website: www.dayahouston.org

Kiran. Inc

PO Box 3513
Chapel Hill, NC 27515- 3513
Phone: KIRAN-INC or 866.547.2646
(Toll-free Crisis Line)
Phone: 919.865.4006
Email: kiraninc@hotmail.com
Website: www.kiraninc.org

Raksha

P.O. Box 12337
Atlanta, GA 30355
Phone: 866.725.7423 or 877.672.5742
(Toll-Free)
Phone: 404.842.0725 (Helpline)
Fax: 404.876.4525
Email: info@raksha.org or
raksha@mindspring.com
Website: www.raksha.org

SAHARA: Asian Women in Distress

Women's Fund of Miami-Dade County
1550 Madruga Avenue, Ste 332
Coral Gables, FL 33146
Phone: 305.284.0118
Contact: Sophie Brion, Women's
Advocacy Project Director
Email: sophie@womensfundmiami.org
Website: www.womensfundmiami.org

SAHELI- Austin

P. O. Box 3665
Austin, TX 78764
Phone: 512.703.8745 (24-hour Voice
Mail Helpline)
Email: saheli@saheli-austin.org
Website: www.saheli-austin.org

Tahirih Justice Center

6066 Leesburg Pike, Suite 220
Falls Church, VA 22041
Phone: 703.575.0070
Email: justice@tahirih.org
Website: www.tahirih.org

Western States**Chaya**

P.O. Box 22291
Seattle, WA 98122
Phone: 877.92CHAYA (Toll-free)
Phone: 206.325.0325 (Helpline)
Phone: 206.568.7576 (Office)
Email: chaya@chayascattle.org
Website: www.chayascattle.org

**South Asian Women's
Empowerment and Resource
Alliance (SAWERA)**

PO Box 912142
Portland, OR 97291
Phone: 503.778.7386 (Helpline)
Phone: 503.641.2425
Email: sawera@sawera.org
Website: www.sawera.org

**Domestic Abuse Women's Network
(DAWN)**

P.O. Box 88007
Tukwila, WA 98138
Phone: 425.656.4305
Phone: 206.622.1881 (Shelter)
Fax: 425.656.4309
Email: dawnetwork@dawnonline.org
Website: www.dawnonline.org

Maitri

234 East Gish Road, Suite 200
San Jose, CA 95112
Phone: 888.8.MAITRI (Toll-free
Hotline)
Phone: 408.436.8393
Email: maitri@maitri.org
Website: www.maitri.org

NARIKA

P.O. Box 14014
Berkeley, CA 94712
Phone: 510.540.0754
Phone: 800.215.7308 (Toll-free)
Fax: 510.540.0201
Website: www.narika.org

SAHARA

18520 1/2 S. Pioneer Blvd., Ste. 204
Artesia, CA 90701
Phone: 888-SAHARA 2 (Toll-free)
Phone: 562.402.4132
Email: sahara_2@hotmail.com
Website: www.charityfocus.org/sahara